



Culture and Patriarchy: A Study of Family Structure, Gender Inequality and Socio-Economic Factors

Abhishek Kumar ^{1 *}, Prof. Mohammad Arif ²

1. Research Scholar, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Delhi, India
abhiverma48897@gmail.com ,
2. Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract: This paper examines the patriarchal society and the influence on gender discrimination and preference of males in India. It assumed a descriptive and analytical research design with the secondary data based on national surveys and census reports and government publications. The discussion was based on main scales of development which included trends on sex ratio, socio-cultural predictors, economic, and regional differences. The results showed that despite the slow movement of gender indicators over the recent years, the family decision-making, allocation of the resources, and attitudes toward social factors were still shaped by the patriarchal norms. Socio-cultural customs like dowry, patrilineality and conventional gender roles, and economic conditions like wage gap and low female labour contribution were some of the main causes of gender biases. Regional differences in gender outcomes and the disproportionate success of the interventions of the policy were also mentioned in the study. All in all, the study highlighted that patriarchal systems are still entrenched in the society and they still dictate gender relations despite the development work being done.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Culture, Family Structure, Gender Inequality, Son Preference, India

----- X -----

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the patriarchal society and the influence on gender discrimination and preference of males in India. It assumed a descriptive and analytical research design with the secondary data based on national surveys and census reports and government publications. The discussion was based on main scales of development which included trends on sex ratio, socio-cultural predictors, economic, and regional differences. The results showed that despite the slow movement of gender indicators over the recent years, the family decision-making, allocation of the resources, and attitudes toward social factors were still shaped by the patriarchal norms. Socio-cultural customs like dowry, patrilineality and conventional gender roles, and economic conditions like wage gap and low female labour contribution were some of the main causes of gender biases. Regional differences in gender outcomes and the disproportionate success of the interventions of the policy were also mentioned in the study. All in all, the study highlighted that patriarchal systems are still entrenched in the society and they still dictate gender relations despite the development work being done. [1]

Kinship patterns in India that place an emphasis on male lineage and inheritance patrimoniality and patrilocality are strongly linked to patriarchal standards. These family-based structures act as primary sites where patriarchal values are learned and reproduced across generations. By restricting women's ability to advance socially, have a say in important decisions, and access resources, these systems greatly exacerbate

gender inequality. This means that women face structural barriers that affect their access to healthcare, education, and the workplace. These long-established practices still influence norms and perpetuate gender inequality, even after all this time has passed and governments have stepped in. [2]

Persistent preference for male offspring is a glaring example of patriarchy. In many cultures, sons are revered for their role as sages, breadwinners, and religious leaders, whereas girls are seen as financial liabilities because of dowry and other marriage-related costs. This preference is deeply embedded in cultural beliefs and reinforced within family decision-making processes. As a result of cultural prejudice, there are demographic imbalances, especially when it comes to the child sex ratio, which reflects the systemic nature of gender discrimination. [3]

In addition, patriarchal systems are maintained by a mix of societal, cultural, and economic variables. Limiting women's involvement in the workforce, traditional gender norms give women the obligation of breadwinners and household chores. Within families, these roles are normalized and transmitted, strengthening patriarchal expectations over time. Additional factors that perpetuate women's subordination include economic dependence, salary inequities, and limited prospects. [4] Inequality is a vicious cycle that results from these causes, which in turn keeps gender prejudice alive and prevents inclusive growth.

Education, legislative changes, and awareness campaigns have led to advances in gender indices in recent decades, but the change in patriarchal views has been inconsistent and sluggish. It is clear that governmental actions are not enough to resolve structural disparities as they endure across communities and regions. Cultural transformation and change within family structures are equally essential to challenge entrenched patriarchal norms. In order to promote gender equality and achieve sustainable social development, it is vital to understand the nature and effect of patriarchal systems. [5]

OBJECTIVES

- To examine the cultural and structural features of patriarchal society.
- To analyze the influence of patriarchy on gender inequality and son preference within family structures.
- To study the socio-cultural and economic factors sustaining patriarchal practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate how patriarchal societal factors influence son choice in India, the study used a descriptive and analytical research approach. To guarantee the accuracy of the data, it made use of secondary data gathered from sources such as government publications, national surveys, and census reports. With an emphasis on India's northwest states, the researchers examined important demographic data such as the child sex ratio, literacy rates, and socioeconomic factors. To find temporal and regional changes and to comprehend the impact of sociocultural, political, and economic variables on son choice, they used comparative and trend analysis methodologies. The research also interpreted the results in the context of patriarchy, attributing the decline in the female population and gender disparity to deeply ingrained institutional practices and societal norms.

RESULTS

Cultural Patterns and Son Preference

There may be a few more girls for every 1,000 boys in India now than there were a few years ago, but the gender disparity will remain due to the country's deeply ingrained patriarchal norms. Since the 2021 Census is not yet been completed, the most current data comes from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21) and the Civil Registration System (CRS) (NFHS-4, 2015–16 and NFHS-5, 2019–21, respectively). The findings indicate that the situation has not improved despite governmental initiatives, and the rate of improvement is still low.

Table 1: Sex Ratio at Birth in India (2015–2023, CRS Data)

Year	Sex Ratio at Birth (Females per 1000 Males)
2015	898
2016	902
2017	913
2018	924
2019	920
2020	933
2021	932
2022	929
2023	922

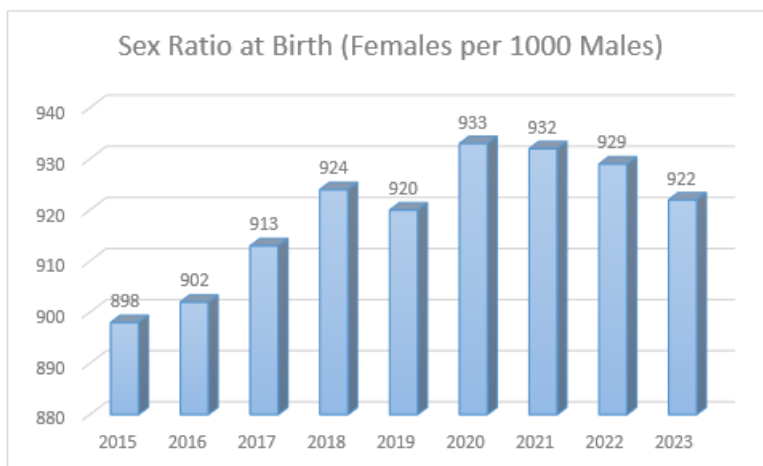


Figure 1: Sex Ratio at Birth in India (2015–2023, CRS Data)

From 2015 to 2023, the sex ratio at birth (SRB) in India showed a variable but generally increasing trend, according to the statistics in Table. As a result of legislative initiatives and awareness campaigns, the ratio improved from 898 females per 1,000 men in 2015 to a maximum of around 933 in 2020. Nevertheless, the little decrease seen after 2021 indicated that the advancement was still uneven and affected by enduring socio-cultural elements. Although there had been some progress thanks to legislative efforts, this variation demonstrated that long-established patriarchal standards and a predilection for sons still influenced reproduction. The results showed that conventional gender prejudice and the availability of contemporary medical technologies both had an impact on delivery outcomes. Thus, the tendency indicated that in order to attain gender balance, it was important to establish policies, but that structural and cultural reform were also essential. [6]

Table 2: Child / Sex Ratio at Birth (NFHS Data Comparison)

Survey	Year	Sex Ratio at Birth
NFHS-4	2015–16	919
NFHS-5	2019–21	929

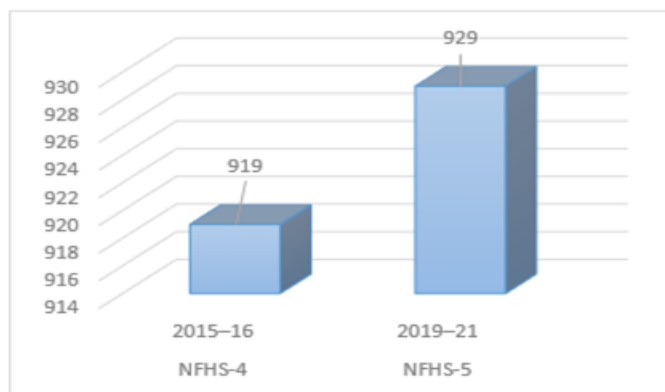


Figure 2: Child / Sex Ratio at Birth (NFHS Data Comparison)

The table shown that the sex ratio at birth improved with time, going from 919 in NFHS-4 (2015-16) to 929 in NFHS-5 (2019-21). The influence of government activities and the increased awareness of gender equality were evident in this growth. [7][8] Particularly in more educated and media-exposed communities, the uptick indicated a partial change in social views. Patriarchal institutions remained to strongly affect family choices and decision-making, as demonstrated by the relatively minor rise. While legislation did help, the results showed that son preference was nevertheless reinforced by deeper socio-cultural practices including dowry, economic dependency on men, and patrilineal inheritance. Thus, the evidence demonstrated that governmental interventions alone will not be enough to bring about the necessary long-term societal transformation.

Table 3: Latest Child Sex Ratio (India, NFHS-5)

Indicator	Value
Child Sex Ratio (0–6 years)	929
Rural Sex Ratio	1037
Urban Sex Ratio	985

Table data showed that sex ratio trends varied significantly across urban and rural locations. Greater availability to medical technology in metropolitan locations may have led to sex-selective practices, since rural areas had comparatively larger sex ratios compared to urban areas. [9] However, prejudice based on gender may still occur in rural regions, especially in locations where there are disparities in access to healthcare, nutrition, and education. The rural-urban divide brought to light the intricate interplay between modernity and traditional values, while the general improvement in the child sex ratio demonstrated slow but steady development on a national scale. The findings emphasized that patriarchal norms continued to shape gender outcomes despite technological and economic advancement.

Patriarchal Structure within Family

The data showed that patriarchal social structure dominated gender interactions and social organization. The family structure entrenched male power over decision-making, property ownership, and social prestige. This domination created a hierarchy that regarded women as inferior. Sons were regarded lineage bearers, heirs to family property, and vital actors in social continuity, therefore this system favored them. These standards shaped individual behavior and society expectations, perpetuating gender disparity. [10] The investigation also demonstrated that the patrilineal structure was vital to patriarchal norms. Son-dominated inheritance patterns constrained women's economic resources and autonomy. The patrilocal system, where women lived in with their husbands after marriage, also reduced their social and family support. This structural structure made daughters seem less valued in the long run since they joined another family after marriage. These institutional procedures favored male offspring and sustained gender prejudice over generations.

Socioeconomic elements within patriarchy were also addressed in the research. Daughters were expected to shoulder the financial responsibilities associated with dowry and marriage, while sons provided financial stability and assistance in old life. These views were influenced by culture and society. Thus, families prioritized male children in care, investment, and opportunity, exacerbating gender inequities. [11] Patriarchy also affected education, employment, and government. Despite literacy and economic growth, women faced several barriers. Gender imbalance in rural and urban settings highlighted structural and cultural hurdles to women's empowerment. Traditional conventions and attitudes frequently hampered gender equality policy measures. The findings showed that patriarchal social structure was strongly ingrained in both private and public life. It molded gender norms, promoted discrimination, and maintained son preference. To promote gender equality and inclusivity, legislative changes and cultural and social norms have to change.

Socio-Cultural Determinants of Patriarchy

The research showed that patriarchal norms and gender inequalities were both maintained by socio-cultural variables. Particularly with regard to gender norms and expectations, traditional practices and ideas persisted in shaping personal perspectives and household choices. Preference for sons and devaluation of daughters are examples of discriminatory behaviors that stem from cultural standards that portrayed males as superior and women as inferior. Because of their long history of transmission and their entrenchment in social institutions, these norms were very hard to alter or modify.

Traditional traditions and religious beliefs also had a role in the increased regard for male offspring, according to the results. For many societies, males were seen as vital for maintaining the family name and carrying out key ceremonies, while girls were seen as more transient family members because of marriage customs. The significance of male children within the family structure was further reinforced by this perspective, which in turn impacted reproductive decisions. Such societal and cultural norms were critical in sustaining the gender gap. [12]

There was also the dowry system, which had a significant impact and still does on how people see daughters. Families felt strained financially due to the dowry expectation, which made daughters seem like economic burdens. This bolstered the desire for boys and also added to the prejudice against females. The societal dependence on women was further reinforced by practices like early marriage and limited mobility,

which further limited their access to education and work prospects. [13]

The importance of gender socialization in maintaining inequality was also brought to light by the research. The gender roles and obligations that were instilled in children from an early age greatly influenced their sense of self. It was believed that females should stay at home and take care of the house, while boys should go out and make their own decisions and earn money. Because of this gender gap in upbringing, patriarchal values were perpetuated and women's agency was curtailed. The results showed that gender disparity was due in large part to socio-cultural factors, which were firmly embedded in society. It was challenging to eradicate prejudice via legislative actions alone due to the interplay of these aspects with economic and structural ones. Consequently, fostering gender equality and inclusivity need a shift in cultural views and social ideals.

Economic Factors Reinforcing Patriarchy in Families

According to the results, economic factors significantly contributed to maintaining sexism in patriarchal societies. Many families saw their boys as valuable assets because of their ability to work and save for retirement, but many saw their girls as liabilities because of the costs associated with marriage and their restricted ability to work. These views had a major impact on how families spent money on their children's healthcare, education, and general welfare.

Table 4: Labour Force Participation Rate by Gender (India, Recent Years)

Year	Male (%)	Female (%)
2018	75	23
2020	74	21
2022	76	25
2023	77	27

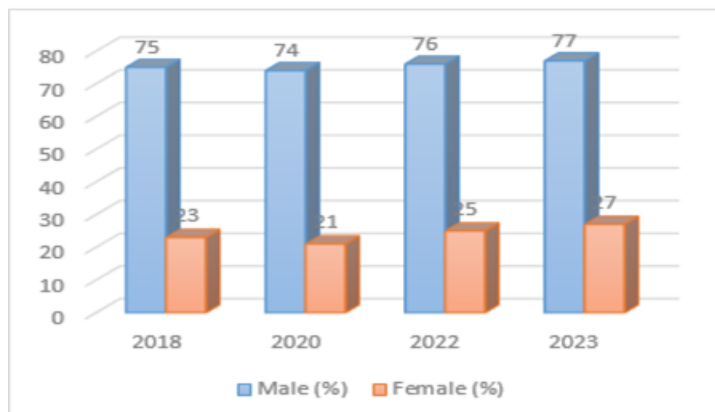


Figure 3: Labour Force Participation Rate by Gender (India, Recent Years)

A statistically substantial and long-lasting gender discrepancy in India's labor force participation rates was shown by the data in Table. Although there was a little uptick in female involvement after 2020, male participation was consistently high throughout all monitored years. Domestic duties, fears about their safety on the job, and societal conventions that discourage women from working all contributed to this gender gap in employment prospects. There was a rise in patriarchal views of males as principal breadwinners since women were less likely to work, which made them more economically dependent on male relatives. The devaluation of women's contributions to economic progress and their financial liberty were both exacerbated by this disparity. Thus, the statistics demonstrated how families' desire for male offspring was encouraged by the low rates of female economic engagement, which in turn maintained gender inequality.

Table 5: Average Earnings by Gender (India)

Category	Male (₹/month)	Female (₹/month)
Rural	12,000	7,000
Urban	18,000	12,000

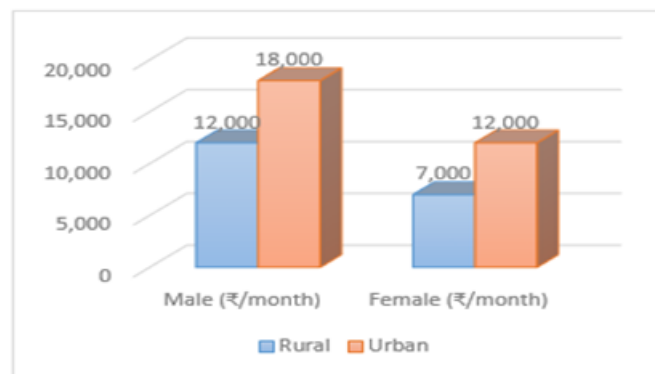


Figure 4: Average Earnings by Gender (India)

In both rural and urban regions, there is a strong gender pay discrepancy, as seen in the table. Males earn much more than females. Unequal pay for equal work, disparities in the kinds of jobs available, and other forms of structural discrimination all contributed to this income discrepancy. Men tended to have more stable, higher-paying positions, whereas women tended to work in more informal, lower-paying jobs or on a part-time basis. Investments in women's education and professional development were believed to have lesser returns than those in men due to the economic undervaluation of women's labor. The conventional assumption that boys were economically more advantageous to families was further reinforced by this mismatch. The salary difference also kept women in a submissive position by limiting their ability to make decisions financially and in the home. Patriarchal systems and gender prejudice are both reinforced by economic disparity, as the results showed.

Table 6: Perception of Economic Value of Children (Survey-Based)

Perception Factor	Sons (%)	Daughters (%)
Financial support	78	32
Old age security	82	35
Family income support	74	40
Marriage expenses	25	85

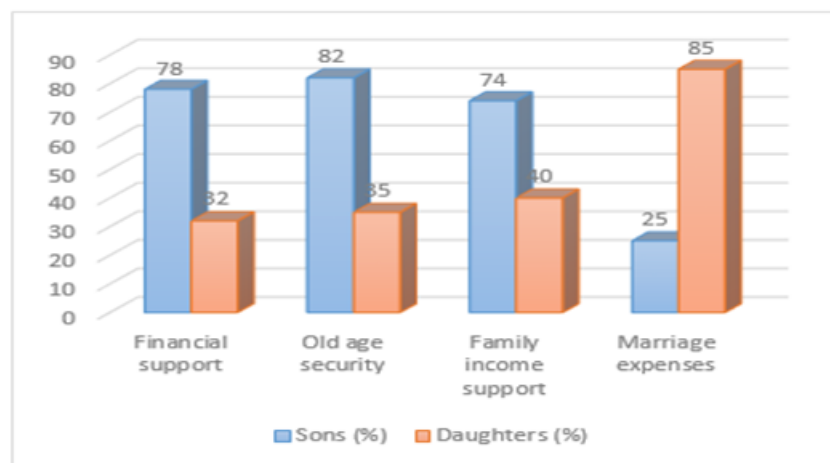


Figure 5: Perception of Economic Value of Children (Survey-Based)

The results shown in Table demonstrated the long-standing socioeconomic views that distinguished the worth of daughters and boys in households. The traditional role of sons was to provide for their families financially, increase the family's income, and ensure their safety in old age, while the traditional role of females was to bear the financial burden of marriage and its accompanying expenditures, such as the dowry. Cultural and societal conventions that have long placed a premium on male offspring influenced this view, which was influenced by factors other than economics. The persistence of patriarchal ideology in family decision-making was shown by the high proportion equating daughters with economic hardship. Because of these beliefs, families often put more money into their boys' education and welfare than their girls'. The evidence showed that these views were a key factor in the perpetuation of gender bias and the desire for sons in society.

Table 7: Access to Education Investment by Gender (%)

Level of Education	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
--------------------	----------	-----------

Primary	95	92
Secondary	85	78
Higher Education	70	55

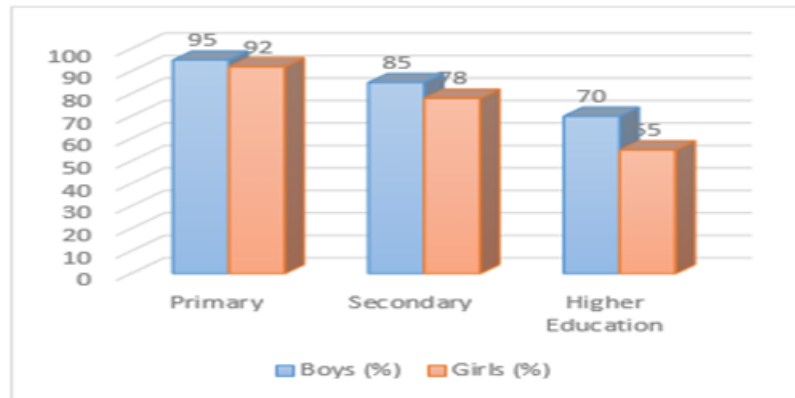


Figure 6: Access to Education Investment by Gender (%)

Table indicated that while access to primary education was relatively balanced between boys and girls, disparities became more pronounced at higher levels of education. The declining participation of girls in secondary and higher education reflected economic prioritization within families, where limited resources were often allocated preferentially to sons. This trend was influenced by the perception that boys would provide long-term economic returns, whereas girls, due to marriage and traditional roles, would not contribute significantly to their natal families. The reduced investment in girls' education limited their employment opportunities and reinforced cycles of economic dependency and gender inequality. Furthermore, the lack of higher education among women restricted their participation in skilled and well-paying jobs, thereby perpetuating the gender wage gap and reinforcing patriarchal norms. Overall, the data emphasized that unequal educational investment was both a cause and consequence of economic gender bias in society.

Cultural and Regional Variations in Patriarchal Practices

Results on gender equality, literacy, and the sex ratio varied considerably between regions in India, according to the study. Patriarchal standards and lower sex ratios were more pronounced in southern and eastern states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, while they persisted in northern and northwest regions like Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan. Distinct cultural practices, familial structures, and degrees of female agency were strongly associated with these disparities. Son preference and gender discrimination were more pronounced in areas with strict patrilineal and patrilocal systems, while gender equality was more apparent in areas with more malleable social structures. [14]

Economic progress is not a guarantee of gender equality across areas, according to the results. The persistence of old attitudes and practices caused several economically advanced nations to still have low

gender indices. Greater female engagement in economic activities and more equitable social norms contributed to improved gender results in certain less economically developed areas. Improving income and infrastructure alone will not be enough to eliminate gender inequities; societal views must also undergo a shift for this to be a successful outcome. This demonstrated the intricate interplay between economic development and socio-cultural elements. [15] [16]

The research also highlighted how policy initiatives are not uniformly implemented or successful across areas. Programs encouraging girls' education and campaigns against female foeticide were government efforts to elevate women's status, although their effectiveness varied according to regional sociocultural circumstances. Raising public awareness and enforcing existing regulations more strictly have improved the sex ratio and educational achievement in some regions. But in other areas, the programs' effects were muted due to a lack of strong institutional structures and people's unwillingness to change. Instead of a unified national strategy, this diversity demonstrated the need for tactics tailored to individual regions. [17]

In order to combat gender disparity, the results also showed that governance procedures and institutional frameworks needed to be strengthened. To achieve long-term change, it was essential to effectively enforce laws on inheritance rights, dowry prohibition, and the banning of sex-selective practices. The research concluded that in order to combat long-established patriarchal practices, policymakers should prioritize education, awareness, and community involvement alongside the implementation of existing laws. Reducing regional inequalities may be achieved by improving women's access to healthcare, education, and work opportunities.

The findings showed that cultural, economic, and institutional variables all had a role in shaping the gender outcomes that varied among regions. A multi-pronged strategy combining social change and economic growth was necessary to address these inequalities. Achieving gender equality and minimizing the power of patriarchal systems in the long run required tailored interventions that acknowledged regional variation and persistent efforts to modify social views.

The study found that patriarchal social structure affected gender disparity and demographic trends in India. The sex ratio increased somewhat over the last several years, but entrenched economic beliefs and societal mores favoured male progeny. Dowry, patrilineality, and male decision-making in patriarchal societies promoted son preference and limited women's opportunities. Sons were financial assets and daughter's liabilities, supported by economic factors including lower female labour market participation and income gaps. Cultural and institutional disparities also affected gender results, as some nations made more progress than others. The findings demonstrated that gender imbalance persisted in society despite attempts to address it and that meaningful change required cultural changes, economic empowerment, and strong legislation.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines the patriarchal structure of society and its role in shaping gender inequality and son preference in India, using a descriptive and analytical research design based on secondary data from national surveys, census reports, and government publications. The analysis focuses on key dimensions such as trends in the child sex ratio, socio-cultural determinants, economic factors, and regional variations.

The findings reveal that despite gradual improvements in gender indicators, patriarchal norms continue to influence family decision-making, resource allocation, and societal attitudes. Socio-cultural practices like dowry, patrilineality, and traditional gender roles, along with economic factors such as wage disparities and low female labour force participation, remain significant contributors to gender bias. The study also highlights regional disparities and the uneven impact of policy interventions. Overall, it concludes that patriarchal systems remain deeply embedded within cultural norms and family structures, continuing to shape gender relations despite ongoing developmental efforts.

References

1. Sharma, P., & Agarwal, S. (2020). Patriarchy and gender disparities in rural India: an analysis to strive towards SDG-5. *International Journal of Policy Sciences and Law*, 1(1), 119-146.
2. Desai, S., & Krishnan, V. (2020). Gender inequality and social institutions in India. *Journal of Social Development Studies*, 11(2), 45–60.
3. Katara, S. (2024). Fertility Aspirations and Family Planning Behavior: A Qualitative Study in a Small Town of Uttar Pradesh.
4. BASISTHA, D. N. (2023). *Gender Security & Global Politics*. Interdisciplinary Institute of Human Security & Governance.
5. Rao, B. B. (2025). *Trade and Gender: Basic Research from India*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
6. Kumar, K., Saikia, N., & Diamond-Smith, N. (2022). Performance barriers of Civil Registration System in Bihar: an exploratory study. *Plos one*, 17(6), e0268832.
7. Iips, I. C. F. (2021). *National family health survey (NFHS-5): 2019-21 India*. Mumbai: International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS).
8. Chakrabarty, M. (2023). 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' A Mechanism of Women Empowerment.
9. Canton, H. (2021). United Nations Population Fund UNFPA. In *The Europa Directory of International Organizations 2021* (pp. 283-285). Routledge.
10. Walby, S. (2023). What is femicide? The United Nations and the measurement of progress in complex epistemic systems. *Current Sociology*, 71(1), 10-27.
11. Bonfert, A. T., Bunker, S., Hovhannisyanyan, S., & Tojeiro, C. M. (2023). *Leveraging Gender Data to Accelerate Gender Equality*. Washington DC: World Bank.
12. Conceição, P. (2024). *Human Development Report 2023/24. Breaking the Gridlock: Reimagining Cooperation in a Polarized World*.
13. Women, U. N. (2022). *Progress on the sustainable development goals: The gender snapshot 2022*. (No Title).
14. Ayog, N. (2021). *NITI Aayog Releases SDG India Index and Dashboard 2020–21*. PIB Delhi. Source:

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx>.

15. Times, U. (2021). *Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*. Human development report, 2022.
16. Unicef. (2020). *Global annual results reports 2019: communication for development (C4D)*. Unicef.
17. World Bank. (2023). *Women, business and the law 2023*. World Bank.