



Gender Disparity Trends In North Eastern States Of India

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Abstract:

Gender disparity, which reflects the status of women in various economic sectors, has a detrimental impact on economic growth and overall societal wellbeing. Preventing women from engaging in social, political, and economic activities can negatively affect society as a whole. To promote gender equality, the government has played a significant role in advancing education, health, and empowerment for women. Despite development initiatives and constitutional guarantees, women have lagged behind men in many sectors, with persistent gaps and inconsistencies in achieving equality. This study examines the trends and patterns of gender disparity in North Eastern India using indicators such as sex ratio, literacy rate, and work participation rate, based on Census data from 1981 to 2011. The findings reveal variations in the sex ratio among the eight states of North Eastern India, with an increasing trend observed in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, and fluctuations in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, and Sikkim. The study also highlights gender disparities in literacy and work participation rates. While these rates are gradually rising for both males and females, a gender gap persists, with higher rates observed for males across all four decades. The study's outcomes will aid decision-makers in formulating and amending policies to address these disparities.

Keywords: Gender disparity, economic growth, education, sex ratio, literacy rate.

Introduction

Gender disparities in India are a critical issue that demands thorough examination and active discussion among various sectors, including media, academia, researchers, and policymakers. Addressing these disparities is essential for fostering an equitable society where both men and women can contribute fully to the nation's development. The Economic Survey for the year 2016-2017 highlighted the urgency of making significant strides to bridge the gender gap, recognizing that overcoming these disparities requires concerted and continuous efforts. According to the Human Development Report (2016) by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), India ranks 125th out of 188 countries on the gender inequality index, with a value of 0.530. This ranking reveals the profound extent of gender inequality in the country. India's gender inequality index is not only higher than the regional average for South Asia, which stands at 0.520, but also

significantly above the global average of 0.433. These figures underscore the pressing need for India to implement effective policies and strategies to enhance gender equality.

The gender inequality index measures disparities across three key dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation. India's performance in these areas reflects deep-rooted societal norms and systemic barriers that hinder women's progress. For instance, in reproductive health, the high maternal mortality rate and adolescent birth rate are indicative of inadequate healthcare access and insufficient reproductive rights. Empowerment, measured through women's representation in parliament and educational attainment, also remains a challenge, with women often facing limited opportunities for political participation and education. Furthermore, labour market participation highlights the economic inequalities that persist, as women in India are frequently restricted to low-paying, informal jobs, or are entirely excluded from the workforce. In comparison to other South Asian countries, India's position is concerning. Only Afghanistan and Pakistan fare worse, with gender inequality index values of 0.667 and 0.546, respectively. Conversely, countries like Maldives, which boasts a gender inequality index value of 0.312, demonstrate that substantial progress is achievable within the region. The Maldives' relatively low index value indicates more significant advancements in areas such as women's health, education, and economic participation, setting an example for India to follow.

To address these disparities, India must adopt a multi-faceted approach. Policies aimed at improving women's health, such as better access to maternal healthcare and family planning services, are crucial. Educational reforms to ensure girls receive quality education and are encouraged to pursue higher studies can significantly enhance their empowerment. Economic initiatives to provide women with equal opportunities in the labour market, support for women entrepreneurs, and measures to close the wage gap are essential steps towards economic equality. Moreover, societal attitudes and cultural norms that perpetuate gender biases need to be challenged. Public awareness campaigns, community engagement, and education can play pivotal roles in shifting perceptions and promoting gender equality. The media, academia, and researchers must also contribute by highlighting issues of gender disparity, conducting studies to understand the root causes, and proposing evidence-based solutions. Addressing gender disparities in India is imperative for the country's social and economic development. The insights from the Economic Survey (2016-2017) and the Human Development Report (2016) by the UNDP emphasize the magnitude of the challenge and the necessity for comprehensive efforts to achieve gender equality. By learning from regional neighbours and implementing robust policies, India can make significant progress in closing the gender gap, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and prosperous society.

Literature Review

The United Nations defines gender as the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, including the relationships between women and men and among women and men themselves. Gender disparity refers to the inequalities in various

social, economic, political, cultural, and legal aspects between men and women. These disparities impact women's status in different sectors of the economy, adversely affecting economic growth and overall well-being. Gender disparities in education, employment, and health opportunities are prevalent in many developing countries, including India. Discrimination against females begins early in life, with female infants facing higher mortality rates due to neglect. As they grow, girls often receive less food and nutrition and fewer schooling opportunities compared to boys. In the labour market, women frequently encounter wage discrimination. Regional differences within India further exacerbate gender disparities. Despite constitutional guarantees and various legislative and policy measures aimed at empowering women, significant gaps and inconsistencies persist. Amartya Sen (2001) highlighted that gender inequality exists worldwide but manifests differently in various contexts. Jayachandran (2014) discussed the roots of gender inequality in developing countries, identifying mechanisms such as the growth of the services sector, technological advances, and reduced childbearing risks that could help reduce gender gaps. The Gender Equality and Millennium Development Goals (2003) report indicated that gender inequality lowers labour productivity and the efficiency of labour allocation, contributing to broader aspects of poverty.

Studies by Marie et al. (2009) and Smits and Huisman (2012) revealed higher illiteracy rates among women than men in almost every country. Kishor and Gupta (2009) and Nisha and Ravi (2010) discussed employment-related gender inequalities, noting several forms of discrimination faced by women. Reena and Aviral (2012) highlighted that the female work participation rate is lower than that of males. Recent findings emphasise the persistence and complexity of gender disparities in India. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2020) highlighted that India ranked 112th out of 153 countries, reflecting significant gender gaps in economic participation, education, health, and political empowerment. The report emphasized that while India has made strides in political representation, with women making up 14.4% of the parliament, economic opportunities for women remain severely limited. In terms of health, research published in *The Lancet* (2019) revealed ongoing challenges, with India having one of the highest gender differentials in child mortality rates. This finding points to persistent neglect and inadequate health care access for female children. Additionally, a study by UNICEF (2019) indicated that adolescent girls in India face higher risks of malnutrition compared to boys, affecting their long-term health and development.

Educational disparities continue to be a significant issue. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2019) showed that although enrollment rates for girls have improved, retention rates drop significantly at higher levels of education, particularly in rural areas. Girls often leave school due to economic pressures, early marriage, and cultural norms that prioritize boys' education. In the employment sector, the International Labour Organization (ILO) report (2020) noted that women's labour force participation in India is among the lowest in the world, at around 20.3%. Women who do work are often concentrated in informal and low-paying jobs, with limited access to

formal employment opportunities and social protections. The report also highlighted that women face significant wage gaps and are less likely to hold managerial positions. Technological advancements and the digital divide have also impacted gender disparities. The GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report (2020) found that women in India are 20% less likely than men to own a smartphone and 50% less likely to use mobile internet, limiting their access to information, services, and economic opportunities. These recent findings emphasize that while there have been some improvements, substantial efforts are still required to address gender disparities in India. Policymakers, researchers, and civil society must continue to collaborate on developing and implementing strategies that promote gender equality across all sectors, ensuring that women and girls can fully participate and benefit from the country's economic and social progress.

Objectives

This study aims to analyse the trends and patterns of women's work participation rates in eight states of North East India including Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Assam. The findings of this study will aid decision-makers in formulating new policies and amending existing ones to address gender disparities.

Materials and Methods

The present research examines gender disparity trends and patterns in the eight states of North East India. The analysis focuses on selected variables such as sex ratio, literacy rate, and work participation rate, utilizing secondary data from the Census of India for the years 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011. Here, sex ratio (SR) is defined as the number of females per 1000 males in the population. Literacy rate (LR) is the percentage of literate individuals aged 7 years and above who can read and write with understanding in any language. And also the work participation rate (WPR) is defined to be the percentage of individuals engaged in economically productive activities with or without compensation or profit. A worker is someone involved in such activities, while a non-worker did not work during the reference period. These metrics will be analysed to understand the gender disparities in the specified states over the last four decades.

Analysis and Results

Sex Ratio:

The sex ratio is a crucial indicator used to measure the extent of gender equity within a society at a specific point in time. It reflects whether women enjoy fundamental rights to survival, protection, and development. Table - 1 provides a detailed overview of the sex ratio across all the North Eastern states of India from 1981 to 2011. Over these four decades, the sex ratio in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Sikkim consistently remained lower than the national average. In contrast, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Tripura consistently exhibited higher sex ratios compared to the national average. In Assam and Mizoram, the sex ratio was below the national average in 1981 and 1991. However, a rising trend in the sex ratio over the last four decades is observed in Assam, Meghalaya,

Mizoram, and Nagaland. Conversely, the other four states experienced fluctuations in their sex ratios from one decade to another. For instance, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Tripura recorded their lowest sex ratios in 1991 and their highest in 2011. Sikkim showed a different pattern, with its lowest sex ratio in 1981 and the highest in 2011. According to the 2011 Census, Meghalaya had the highest sex ratio at 989, followed by Manipur at 985. Sikkim, on the other hand, had the lowest sex ratio at 890.

Literacy Rate:

Education is a critical determinant of women's status in society. However, many Indian women are deprived of educational opportunities due to various socio-cultural and economic factors. Women in the North East are somewhat better positioned compared to the national average, but they still face significant educational barriers. The present study analyses gender disparity in education using literacy rates. While both male and female literacy rates have gradually increased, a gender gap persists, with males being more literate than females across all four decades (Table - 2). Notably, the gender gap in literacy in the North-Eastern states was generally lower than the national literacy gap, which stood at 26.6% in 1981, 25.0% in 1991, 21.6% in 2001, and 16.3% in 2011. This gap has been narrowing over time. Mizoram consistently had the highest literacy rates for both males and females over the four decades, whereas Arunachal Pradesh had the lowest. Meghalaya recorded the smallest gender gap in literacy in 1981 (9.5%) and 2011 (3.1%), while Mizoram had the lowest gaps in 1991 (7.0%) and 2001 (4.0%). Conversely, Manipur had the highest gender gap in literacy in 1981 (29.5%) and 1991 (25.0%), and Arunachal Pradesh had the highest gaps in 2001 (20.3%) and 2011 (16.3%).

Work Participation Rate:

Table - 3 highlights the gender differential in work participation rates (WPR) across the eight North Eastern states over four decades. WPR is a significant indicator of economic empowerment for both men and women in society. However, gender gaps in WPR have fluctuated from one decade to the next. In all eight states, the WPR for women has consistently been lower than that for men from 1981 to 2011, indicating a persistent gender gap in labour participation. Specifically, the gender gap in WPR in Tripura has been higher than the national average in all four decades. In contrast, the other North Eastern states, except for Assam in 2001 (29.2%) and 2011 (31.1%), had gender gaps lower than the national average. Manipur had the lowest gender gap in WPR in 1981 (7.3%) and 1991 (6.3%), whereas Nagaland had the lowest gaps in 2001 (8.6%) and 2011 (8.7%). These findings confirm the ongoing challenges and progress in achieving gender equity in the North Eastern states of India. Addressing these disparities requires targeted policies and sustained efforts to ensure that women enjoy equal opportunities in survival, education, and economic participation.

Discussion

The sex ratio acts as a critical gauge of societal balance between genders, particularly evident in India's north eastern states. Here, where male population consistently

outnumbers females, socio-economic and cultural dynamics play a pivotal role. While some states have witnessed an upward trend in sex ratios over the last four decades, others have experienced fluctuations. This disparity is deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, favouring male offspring, which leads to phenomena like sex-selective abortions facilitated by modern technologies. Traditional beliefs, socio-economic factors such as the dowry system, and security concerns further exacerbate this imbalance. These findings resonate with earlier research by Kumar (2012) and Paul and Saha (2015). Education emerges as a key determinant of women's societal standing, yet persistent disparities persist in north eastern India. Despite strides in literacy rates for both genders, female literacy still falls behind males. Negative parental attitudes towards educating girls, compounded by poverty and inadequate infrastructure, hinder female education. The dearth of female teachers compounds challenges in gender-segregated societies. These findings parallel those of Islam and Mustaqim (2015) and Taufeeq and Hashmi (2017). The Work Participation Rate (WPR) serves as a measure of economic empowerment, reflecting disparities between men and women across north eastern states. Despite India's economic progress, women's WPR remains consistently lower than men's, influenced by socio-economic factors such as family size, job location, and caste. This is corroborated by studies by Reena and Aviral (2012), Nagaich and Sharma (2014), and Borkar (2016). In conclusion, the discussion underscores the need for collaborative efforts to comprehensively address gender disparities. By challenging entrenched socio-cultural norms, enhancing educational opportunities for girls, and promoting women's workforce participation, policymakers, researchers, and civil society can work together to foster gender equality and drive inclusive development in India's north eastern states.

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite numerous developmental efforts and constitutional assurances, gender disparities persist among women in India's north eastern region compared to men across various sectors. These persistent gaps, which vary from state to state, pose significant obstacles to achieving developmental objectives and ultimately hinder economic growth. Recognizing the indispensable roles of both men and women in a nation's progress underscores the urgency of attaining gender equality for societal advancement. Addressing these disparities necessitates a concerted focus on enhancing female literacy and empowerment, alongside providing equal opportunities for women in political and social spheres to foster social cohesion. Government policies must prioritize the eradication of sex identification and abortions, with initiatives like Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" campaign reliant on societal shifts in attitudes towards women for success. Emphasizing gender equality through education and empowerment emerges as pivotal for achieving balanced and inclusive development in India's north eastern states. The persistence of gender disparities across various sectors in India has far-reaching implications for women's status and overall development. Recent research findings underscore the ongoing challenges, including gaps in economic participation, education, health, and political empowerment. Despite some strides forward, comprehensively addressing these disparities demands

substantial efforts. Collaboration among policymakers, researchers, and civil society is essential to devise and implement strategies that promote gender equality across all sectors. Only through such concerted action can women and girls fully participate in and benefit from India's economic and social progress.

Table - 1: Sex Ratio of North East States

States & India	1981	1991	2001	2011
All India	934	927	933	943
Arunachal Pradesh	862	859	893	938
Assam	910	923	935	958
Manipur	971	958	978	985
Meghalaya	954	955	972	989
Mizoram	919	921	935	976
Nagaland	863	886	900	931
Sikkim	835	878	875	890
Tripura	946	945	948	960

Table - 2: Literacy Rate of North East States

States	1981			1991			2001			2011		
	M	F	GG	M	F	GG	M	F	GG	M	F	GG
India	56.5	29.9	26.7	64.2	39.2	25.0	75.3	53.7	21.6	80.9	64.6	16.3
Arunachal P.	35.1	14.0	21.1	51.5	29.7	21.8	63.8	43.5	20.3	72.6	57.7	14.9
Assam	NA	NA	NA	61.9	43.0	18.8	71.3	54.6	16.7	77.8	66.3	11.5
Manipur	64.2	34.7	29.5	71.6	47.6	24.0	80.3	60.5	19.8	83.6	70.3	13.3
Meghalaya	46.7	37.2	9.5	53.1	44.9	8.3	65.4	59.6	5.8	76.0	72.9	3.1
Mizoram	79.4	68.6	10.8	85.6	78.6	7.0	90.7	86.7	4.0	93.3	89.3	4.0
Nagaland	58.6	40.4	18.2	67.6	54.8	12.9	71.2	61.5	9.7	82.8	76.1	6.7
Sikkim	53.0	27.4	25.6	65.7	46.7	19.0	76.0	60.4	15.6	86.6	75.6	11.0
Tripura	61.5	38.0	23.5	70.6	49.7	20.9	81.0	64.9	16.1	91.5	82.7	8.8

M - Male, F - Female, GG - Gender Gap

Table - 3: Work participation Rate of North East States

States	1981			1991			2001			2011		
	M	F	GG	M	F	GG	M	F	GG	M	F	GG
India	52.7	19.8	32.9	51.6	22.3	29.3	51.7	25.6	26.1	53.3	25.5	27.8
Arunachal P.	58.6	45.7	12.9	53.8	37.5	16.3	50.6	36.5	14.1	49.1	35.4	13.7
Assam	NA	NA	NA	49.5	21.6	27.9	49.9	20.7	29.2	53.6	22.5	31.1
Manipur	46.8	39.5	7.3	45.3	39	6.3	48.1	39	9.1	51.4	39.9	11.5
Meghalaya	54	37.5	16.5	50.1	34.9	15.2	48.3	35.1	13.2	47.2	32.7	14.5
Mizoram	52.5	37.7	14.8	53.9	43.5	10.4	57.3	47.5	9.8	52.4	36.2	16.2
Nagaland	52.6	43.2	9.4	46.9	38	8.9	46.7	38.1	8.6	53.4	44.7	8.7
Sikkim	57.2	37.6	19.6	51.3	30.4	20.9	57.4	38.6	18.8	60.2	39.6	20.6
Tripura	50.7	12.8	37.9	47.6	13.8	33.8	50.6	21.1	29.5	55.8	23.6	32.2

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