



VOICES OF EMPOWERMENT

Inaugural Reflections from the Centre for
Gender Empowerment Studies and Research



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Title:

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Words of Inspiration



It is a matter of great pleasure for me to share a few words on the occasion of the publication of *“Voices of Empowerment: Inaugural Reflections from the Centre for Gender Empowerment Studies and Research”*. The establishment of this Centre at Adamas University is both timely and meaningful, as conversations around gender, equity, and inclusion have never been more important.

Universities are not only spaces for academic learning but also platforms where social consciousness is shaped. Through CGESR, the University has taken a thoughtful step toward encouraging dialogue, research, and engagement on issues that affect everyday lives. The Centre has the potential to bridge scholarship with real-world concerns and to promote understanding that goes beyond classrooms and textbooks.

The inaugural programme and the papers included in this volume reflect the collective effort and commitment of the chief guests, keynote speakers, faculty members, researchers, and students who believe in using knowledge as a tool for positive change. I appreciate their dedication and vision in bringing this initiative to life.

I am confident that this Centre for Gender Empowerment Studies and Research will continue to grow as a space for meaningful inquiry and social engagement, contributing to a more inclusive and empathetic society.

With my best wishes,

Prof. (Dr.) Samit Ray

Chancellor
Adamas University

Words of Encouragement



Gender empowerment is among the most pressing transformative concerns of our time that seeks to redress deep-seated and historically entrenched socio-economic injustice. Meaningful gender empowerment requires the dismantling of structural barriers produced by patriarchy and sustained through intersecting axes of inequality such as caste, class, race, sexuality, disability, and other forms of marginalization.

The articles, brought together by the Centre for Gender Empowerment Studies and Research of our University, aptly approach gender empowerment not merely as goal to be attained, but as an ongoing, dynamic process – one that interrogates entrenched hierarchies, reconfigures power relations and expands the horizon of human freedom. The contributors adopt a distinctly interdisciplinary perspective, drawing upon insights from history, sociology, economics, political science, law, literature and gender studies to illuminate the complexity of the subject.

I congratulate my colleagues at the Centre for collating a set of inclusive and thought-provoking essays that make for rewarding a reading. It is heartening that, through the collective efforts of its members, the Centre under the leadership of Dr. Snehamanju Basu has been able to carve out a distinctive niche in the field of Gender Studies within a relatively short period of time. I am confident that the Centre will continue to make significant contributions to the understanding of gender empowerment as a multidimensional process – neither uniform nor linear – but encompassing economic independence, educational access, bodily autonomy, political representation and socio-cultural recognition.

I wish the Centre every success in fulfilling its mandate.

Prof. Suranjan Das

Vice-Chancellor
Adamas University

Words of Appreciation



It is with great pride and a deep sense of responsibility to announce that the Centre for Gender Empowerment Studies and Research is publishing its proceeding on gender empowerment studies and research. This collection is not only a testament to the academic rigor and collaborative spirit that drive our work, but also a reflection of our shared commitment to a more inclusive, equitable, and just society.

The Centre was founded with the vision of challenging entrenched social structures and creating transformative spaces for dialogue, scholarship, and action. In a world where gender identities and experiences are continually evolving, it is imperative that academic institutions play a proactive role in promoting equity and understanding. Their work is grounded in intersectionality, acknowledging how gender intersects with caste, class, race, religion, sexuality, and ability.

I am sure that this volume reflects diverse voices—scholars, practitioners, students, and activists—whose contributions push boundaries and offer fresh insights into gender justice, empowerment, and policy advocacy. It also affirms that empowerment is not merely a goal but an ongoing process of inquiry, resistance, and reimagining.

I must thank all contributors and partners for their invaluable efforts. May these proceedings inspire further research, policy reform, and grassroots action toward gender equity. Together, we strive to build a world where every individual—regardless of gender—can live with dignity, freedom, and opportunity.

With regards

Dr. Radha Tamal Goswami

Pro-Vice Chancellor
Adamas University

Special Message



It gives me immense pleasure to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Adamas University and the *Centre for Gender Empowerment Studies and Research* on this remarkable initiative. The establishment of such a Centre marks a significant step towards creating a more inclusive, equitable and empowered society.

Gender empowerment is not only a social necessity but also a cornerstone for sustainable development and progress. I am confident that this Centre will provide a platform for meaningful research, dialogue and action that will inspire positive change in our communities.

I convey my best wishes to the faculty, researchers and students associated with this initiative. May your dedicated efforts continue to enrich society with knowledge, awareness and empowerment, paving the way for a brighter and more equitable future.

With warm regards,

Dr. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar

Member of Parliament,
Lok Sabha (Barasat, West Bengal, India)

FOREWORD



Building an Inclusive Tomorrow

It gives me immense pleasure and pride to convey my heartfelt congratulations to all the Committee members of Centre for Gender Empowerment Studies and Research (CGESR) on the occasion of publishing the first edition of this research journal of the Centre. This publication encapsulates the initiatives taken by the members conducting several awareness programmes, outreach activities related to female health and hygiene, maternal well-being, legal rights and laws for women and various other issues related to women's empowerment. The Center stands as a vibrant platform dedicated to fostering dialogue, scholarship, and transformative action toward gender equality and inclusivity.

This edition is a reflection of our collective vision – to create an academic and social ecosystem where gender sensitivity is not merely an aspiration but a lived reality. Through our collaborative projects, seminars, workshops and research-driven engagements, CGESR continues to empower minds, inspire voices, and strengthen the foundation of an equitable society.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all contributors, faculty members, and students whose efforts and insights have made this publication possible. May this endeavor encourage many more to engage in meaningful conversations and actions toward building a world rooted in respect, equality, and empowerment.

With warm regards,

Prof. (Dr.) Snehamanju Basu

Chairperson
Centre for Gender Empowerment Studies and
Research (CGESR)

Director-IQAC
Adamas University

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Reflections on Gender Empowerment

Dr. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar

Member of Parliament, Government of India

[N.B.: The following text presents the speech delivered by Dr. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, Hon'ble Member of Parliament of India, on the occasion of the inaugural programme of the Centre for Gender Empowerment Studies and Research, Adamas University held on April 8, 2025.]

First of all, I thank you for having me here. Here is the Hon'ble Chancellor, Dr. Samit Ray, who's doing great for educating young people. Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, Professor Suranjan Das, he is known to me over many years. We also have with us here, Professor Nirmal Kanti Chakraborti, Professor Chiranjib Bhattacharjee and Prof. Snehamanju Basu, who had come to meet me at the onset.

Let me congratulate all the staff members, all the faculty, teaching staff and students for getting the A accreditation from NAAC. It's a great achievement and I guess this achievement is a follow-up of the hard work put in by the staff members who deserve a special applause and a special gift. Thank you so much. I've been listening to the very serious discussion going on here, so I will make it on a lighter note. I was a little confused, then it got clear though through your lectures, whether it is gender empowerment or gender equality.

If it is gender empowerment, as far as medical technology terminology goes, there are three kinds of genders. There are males, there are females, and there is the third gender, the transgender. So, are we taking all into account? I was discussing this with Hon'ble Chancellor here, but then some of it got addressed though, through the beautiful lecture, very authoritative, by Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor and also Prof. Snehamanju Basu. So, I will take it a little lighter. If we take it that we are really talking about the empowerment of women, educating of women, then this is my feeling, that the only thing that women can do and men can't do is that science hasn't yet taken you (the men) forward to carry babies. So, we are hands down ahead of you.

Women are hands down ahead of men because they carry babies, they bring up babies, they nurture babies, and the future of the society depends in the hand of the woman because the woman carries forward the legacy of the society. Now, as Professor Suranjan Das said, the fight for equal payment was taken forward by none other than a lady in Germany, Clara Zetkin. She fought for it, and today whatever payment we are getting, the women, wherever we are working, is because of Clara Zetkin. You would be astonished to know that, as Prof. Das also mentioned, Emmeline Pankhurst was the woman who sat outside the British Parliament asking for equal rights to vote. At that time, in the 18th-19th century, women were not allowed to cast their franchise. So, it's not that we are lagging behind in India. It was there even in the Western countries, and through the effort of women, through the effort of these women who fought, we have gained the position where we are today. However, in terms of gender empowerment, we can say that we are still not equal. The women, whatever fight we have done, whatever distance we have covered, it's still a long way to go. It's still a long way to go because where I come from, where I work now, my office, that is the Parliament House, you see, even after a lot of sound, a lot of debate, discourse, discussion all the other political parties put together, we have women members to the tune of about 10%.

There is one political party, a lot of discussion is going on against that political party, against the leadership, but that party has put 35% of women inside the parliament, out of which I am there, one of the 35, and even when the women were fielded to fight, I'm not doing politics here, so there is nothing to smirk, 35% women were fielded on the road to fight the heat last year at 44-46 degree temperature, and we were not placed against other women, We were placed in general seats to fight against men. And 33% of them have gone to the citadel of democracy. It's known as the citadel of democracy because the laws are formulated there. The laws are passed. We all have to follow laws and we would request everybody else in the country to look up and at least, if not 50, have 30% women everywhere. Like, you know, just now I was introduced to a

Madam who is looking after a very important department. She has been thought to be fit enough to look after that department there. So, we have to change our mindset. Now how do we change our mindset? I would request, I think it was mentioned by somebody, that who is the first person to be sensitized in a family of married women to have their rights? It is the mother-in-law, but not mother-in-law like me, because, my daughters-in-law are my bosses at home. So, not like me, but other kinds of mother-in-law. They have to be sensitized because it is the mother-in-law who doesn't realize that the daughter-in-law in her womb is carrying her future. She doesn't give enough food to the daughter-in-law. She doesn't give enough liberty to the daughter-in-law. She doesn't give enough education to her.

The women's committees in Nepal, (I attended a United Nations conference where they were there) go to the mothers-in-law, they have meetings with the mothers-in-law, explaining the seriousness that it is the daughter-in-law who needs your attention for having nutritious food when she is pregnant. Because it is not for her, it is for your progeny, it is for your family. So, sensitization of the mother-in-laws and the mothers is very important and if you are looking at sensitizing women, as I said, mothers-in-law, mothers and other family members, you see, as there might be more women in the family, and out of them one is educated enough or trying to get the others educated, but sometimes it may happen that women of the family act as deterrent to the education of the girlchild of the family. So, my point is that it is the women of the family who should be actually sensitized.

It is a great move that Adamas University is trying and is actually already on the path towards a great achievement through its initiative of adopted villages, where women can be approached. They have to be educated. There are two or three major points. One is education. Without education, without proper education, we don't see the future. We cannot fight the present. That is the basic education. I'm not talking about postgraduates or I'm not talking about PhDs. It is the traditional education. It is the basic education, the social education, which tells you that you have to maintain your traditions. You might be however educated, you cannot forget your tradition. Tradition holds the society together. Just because I'm educated, I'm just giving an example, being a married woman, I stop putting *sindoor*, I don't wear a *shakha*, because I'm liberal or liberated – such practice harms the tradition. It harms the backbone of the society. It harms the values.

You have to respect the values, your own country's values, your own religious values. It might be any religion. Religion is absolutely my own perspective. It is my own. It is not for somebody else to dictate what I will do. But I will be allowed and I should be allowed and I will practice my own way, my social norms, my religion, my tradition. It should be included in the education. Second is food. You see, without proper nutrition, nobody can thrive, no human being can grow, and no brain will function. What kind of food? It is the natural food. You know, I have a parliamentary discourse which is viral on YouTube, about three or four or five years ago maybe, I was talking about natural food and it was appreciated throughout the world. I'm so proud that for the last three or four years the government has been promoting millets and natural food that is our country's food. Natural food is full of vitamins. If you look up the YouTube today, even western countries are promoting natural food, fruits and vegetables because it helps you grow healthy. The food that we get on the road might be tasty, but it doesn't help you grow because it is so much processed, so much high temperature and so much of oil, so much of spices go into it. I am absolutely going to the ground level, natural food gives you the strength to fight. What do you have to fight? You have to fight society. You have to fight in your workplace. You have to fight yourself when you are studying. Now, mostly women have to work both at home and outside. Just because you are working outside, you are earning outside, you are not left alone that you can do away with your domestic chores. No. Even in the house you have to work. So, to do so much of hard work, women have to be strong. They have to be strong physically, So, you have to do exercises, whether you do yoga, whether you do freehand, whether you do running, you do swimming, whichever.

Being a doctor also, I say that your cardiac output should be so strong that little bit of taunting, little bit of bad behaviour doesn't throw it into tamponade. So, you have to do exercise. First you

eat. World Health Organization gives us statistics that whole of the world has seen the women are last to eat and least to eat. Now how are they last to eat? I travel in villages every day. I spend about five to ten hours in the villages. There, the woman gets up in the morning, she cleans the house, she cleans her cow shed, then she makes the food, first serves her in-laws, serves her children, serves her husband and after that, she gives food and water, the fodder, to the cows in the shed. Then they might be having some goats. So, after all this, she is the last to eat. And by the time she gets time to eat, then there is very little left, so least to eat. This is a from a World Health Organization report. Further, India has 70% of women suffering from anemia. Why? Because they are the last to eat and they don't get the protein. I think Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor mentioned that the greater share of protein goes to the boy. That is true. The protein share goes to the boy. The mother gives it. So, the mother has to be sensitized. If you go through the villages in Nepal, you will find that the people there sensitize the mothers and the mothers-in-law. Not only mother-in-law, even the mother. Because they feel that my boy is going to grow up and look after me. My daughter is going to go away to another family. But nowadays we find that the daughters look after their parents more (my daughters-in-law look after me more than my sons). This is because the sons have so much of ambition. They don't have time to pay attention to the house. And they are equal. What difference is there? They are physically equal if they look after themselves. They are mentally equal if they are trained and educated. To conclude, I would like to say this: Empowerment—whether we call it gender empowerment or gender equality—begins at home, with awareness, with sensitivity, and with education. Women have travelled a long path, breaking barriers and shaping history, but the journey ahead is still long. True empowerment will come only when every woman receives equal opportunity, equal respect, equal nourishment, and equal space to dream. Let us remember three pillars - Education, Nutrition and Health, and Sensitization of Families and Society. If our homes, our institutions, and our workplaces stand together to uphold these values, then real empowerment will not remain a topic of discussion—it will become a lived reality.

I congratulate Adamas University once again for its NAAC A accreditation and for taking meaningful steps through outreach, village adoption, and academic commitment. You are not just educating students; you are shaping a more equitable future. Let us continue to work together so that every woman, every daughter, and every mother stands strong—not behind anyone, but beside everyone. Thank you.

Note: The above speech has been transcribed into text by Ms. Dishari Ganguly.

Advancing Gender Empowerment: Challenges, Strategies, and Pathways to Equity

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Abstract

Gender empowerment is a critical component of sustainable development and social justice. This research paper explores the theoretical foundations, global trends, and practical strategies for empowering individuals across the gender spectrum. Drawing from global datasets, case studies, and scholarly literature, it examines barriers to gender equity and successful interventions. The study concludes that while progress has been made, structural inequalities remain deeply rooted and require multidimensional approaches combining policy reform, education, and grassroots activism.

Keywords: Gender, Global, Empowerment, Critical, Component, Sustainable, Development, Social, Justice, Research

1. Introduction

Gender empowerment refers to the process of increasing the political, social, educational, and economic strength of individuals of all genders, particularly women and marginalized gender groups. It is essential for achieving inclusive growth, human rights, and democratic governance. Despite international efforts such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 5, significant disparities in power, opportunity, and representation persist globally (UN Women, 2023).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

Feminist theory provides a foundation for understanding the dynamics of gender inequality and the importance of agency. Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "becoming a woman" challenges the essentialist views of gender, suggesting that empowerment involves self-determination and societal recognition (de Beauvoir, 1949). Judith Butler's theory of performativity argues that gender is not an innate quality but a social construct, thereby highlighting the significance of breaking normative gender roles in empowerment efforts (Butler, 1990).

Intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, reveals how gender intersects with race, class, disability, and other identities to produce unique experiences of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). This lens is critical to designing inclusive empowerment initiatives.

Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach focuses on what individuals are able to do and be. It moves beyond income-based assessments of empowerment to include education, bodily integrity, political voice, and emotional well-being (Nussbaum, 2000).

2.2 Global Perspectives

Global studies reflect significant regional variations in gender empowerment. In Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, traditional gender roles, early marriage, and lack of access to education disproportionately affect women (UNDP, 2023). Conversely, Scandinavian countries lead in gender parity due to comprehensive social welfare systems and proactive gender policies (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Reports from the UNDP and World Economic Forum underline that while educational attainment has improved globally, economic and political empowerment lag behind. Moreover, LGBTQ+ individuals face systemic barriers and are often excluded from empowerment metrics (World Bank, 2024).

2.3 Media and Representation

Media plays a dual role in both reinforcing stereotypes and serving as a platform for advocacy. Feminist media scholars argue that positive representation of diverse gender identities can shift societal norms (Gill, 2007). Campaigns like #MeToo and UN Women's HeForShe illustrate the power of media in mobilizing public opinion and policy change (UN Women, 2021).

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to capture both the breadth and depth of gender empowerment issues.

3.1 Quantitative Methods

Data were collected from the UN Gender Inequality Index (GII), World Bank Gender Statistics, and Global Gender Gap Reports from 2019 to 2024. Variables included labor force participation, political representation, educational attainment, and reproductive health. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS to identify trends and correlations (World Bank, 2024).

3.2 Qualitative Methods

Three case studies were selected to represent diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts:

- **Kenya:** Focused on community-based women's cooperatives and microfinance programs (Oxfam, 2022).
- **India:** Analyzed the impact of Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and gender-based education policies (Chen, 2005).
- **Sweden:** Examined gender mainstreaming in government policy and corporate sectors (OECD, 2021).

Data collection included semi-structured interviews with activists, policymakers, and beneficiaries, as well as content analysis of policy documents and NGO reports.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Barriers to Gender Empowerment

- **Economic Inequality:** Women and gender minorities face wage disparities, limited access to credit, and underrepresentation in formal employment sectors (ILO, 2023).
- **Social and Cultural Norms:** Patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes restrict mobility, decision-making power, and access to education and health services (UNESCO, 2022).
- **Legal and Institutional Barriers:** In many countries, laws around inheritance, property rights, and workplace protections are either absent or poorly enforced (World Bank, 2024).
- **Violence and Safety:** Gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue globally, affecting physical and psychological well-being and limiting public participation (WHO, 2023).

4.2 Strategies That Work

- **Education and Skill Development:** Programs promoting girls' education, vocational training, and adult literacy have shown long-term impacts on economic independence and community leadership (UNICEF, 2023).
- **Political Participation:** Countries implementing quotas for women in political office, such as Rwanda and Nepal, have seen significant increases in female representation and influence over policy (IPU, 2023).
- **Legal Reform and Advocacy:** Legislative changes that promote gender equality in land rights, labor laws, and protections against domestic violence have shown positive outcomes when coupled with public education campaigns (UN Women, 2023).
- **Technology and Digital Inclusion:** Access to mobile banking, online education, and social

media enables women and LGBTQ+ individuals to bypass traditional barriers and build networks (GSMA, 2023).

4.3 Case Study Insights

- **Kenya:** Women's cooperatives improved household incomes and allowed participants to influence local governance (Oxfam, 2022).
- **India:** SEWA enabled financial independence for thousands of informal workers and promoted policy changes at the state level (Chen, 2005).
- **Sweden:** Gender budgeting and parental leave policies have led to more equitable workforce participation and domestic labor sharing (OECD, 2021).

5. Conclusion

Empowering individuals across the gender spectrum is fundamental to building equitable, resilient societies. While international frameworks and national policies have facilitated progress, true empowerment requires a cultural shift alongside structural reform. Education, legal equality, economic access, and safe environments must be pursued simultaneously (Sen, 1999).

The research confirms that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. Context-sensitive strategies that account for cultural, economic, and political realities yield better outcomes. Intersectionality must remain central in both research and policy-making to ensure no one is left behind (Crenshaw, 1989).

Future research should focus on the experiences of transgender and non-binary individuals, as well as the role of emerging technologies in shaping new pathways for empowerment. Collaboration among governments, NGOs, the private sector, and local communities will be critical to sustaining momentum and achieving global gender equity.

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Collaborative Capacity Building Approach of Adamas University and Sundarban Green Environment Association for Household Vegetable Production through Soilless Agriculture in Kumirmari, Gosaba, Sundarban

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Abstract

The ecologically fragile Sundarbans region faces persistent food insecurity, saline soils, limited arable land, and climate stress. To address these, Adamas University, in collaboration with the local NGO Sundarban Green Environment Association (SGEA), initiated a capacity-building project for Self-Help Group (SHG) members—mainly women—focused on household-level soilless agriculture to enable sustainable vegetable production and improve nutritional self-reliance. SHG members received training on soilless vegetable production system systems using reused plastic bottles, grow bags, coconut coir, and nutrient solutions. Hands-on demonstrations were conducted in Kumirmari block, Gosaba, supported by active community participation and SGEA field volunteers. This collaborative model showcases how Adamas Universities, NGOs, and rural communities can address agricultural challenges through innovation, highlighting soilless agriculture as a climate-resilient, space-saving, and gender-inclusive strategy for fragile ecosystems like the Sundarbans.

Keywords: Sundarban, Household, Soilless vegetable production, Capacity Building

1. Introduction

Sundarban presents a complex and delicate deltaic ecosystem, vulnerable to frequent cyclones, saline flood and unpredictable monsoon. Traditional open field agriculture is often challenged by the calamities, enhance soil salinity and lack of fertile land, those in turn directly or indirectly affect agro-based economics (Mondal et al., 2023). Moreover, lack of alternative opportunities, limited market and limited decision-making power raise significant gender-based inequalities, especially towards women, also impact on food security of women and child (Datta & Mete, 2022). Agrotechnology and Rural Development Centre of Adamas University, in collaboration with Sundarban Green Environment Association (SGEA) – a local NGO in Sundarban addresses the issue by introducing climate independent soilless agriculture to those marginalized groups, enabling them to produce crops using low-cost sustainable techniques with extremely limited use of space and resource. Empowering women with this innovative technology initiates a step forward for resolving the underlying ecological and socioeconomic issues like environment sustainability, climate resilience, food security, poverty alleviation and gender equality which directly contribute to more than one sustainable development goals (SDG) of United Nations such as SDG-2: Zero Hunger, SDG-5: Gender Equality and SDG-13: Climate Action (Shahbaz et al., 2022).

2. Study Area

Kumirmari village, situated in an isolated island of Indian Sundarban Delta in Gosaba Block of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, has been selected as the study area (Figure 1) as it is a highly susceptible region to the effects of climate change like cyclones, flood and saline soil, besides women are mostly limited by restricted access to resources and services resulting into considerable socioeconomic obstacle for them.

Training for vegetable plantation and maintenance in cocoa peat to Self Help Group at Kumirmari block, Gosaba, South 24 Parganas

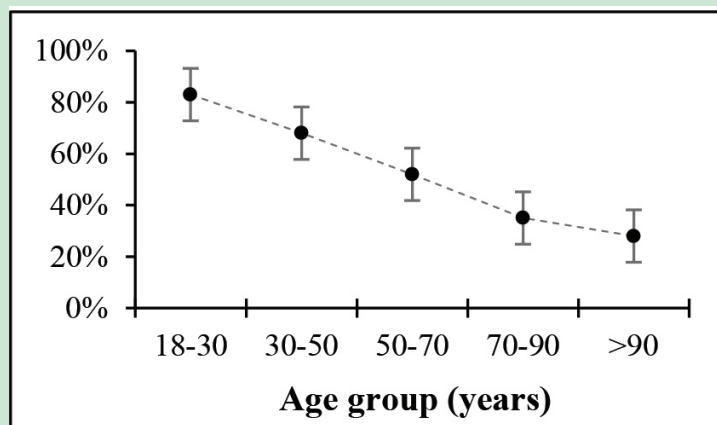
4.2. Participants' responses

The young age group (18-30 years) found to be mostly encouraged in engaging in soilless agriculture practices (Table-1). However, with increasing age, participants displayed a continuous trend of reduced interest in engaging in alternative farming practices (Figure 3).

Table 1- Participants' response to willingness for engaging in soilless agriculture

| Age group (years) | Response (%) |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 20-30 | 83% |
| 30-40 | 68% |
| 40-50 | 52% |
| 50-60 | 35% |
| >60 | 28% |

Figure 3: Participants' willingness to actively engage in soilless agriculture



5. Discussion

Vegetable plants produced through soilless technique in this programme proves this to be a promising approach in resolving climate issues in traditional agriculture. Soilless agriculture using re-purposed household items like plastic bottles have been previously proven to facilitate sustainable food production and boost rural economy [4,5]. Large number of women participants, especially those at their 20s-30s showed enormous interest in active engagement into soilless cultivation technology. Active participation of women in alternative farming paves a way for generating an alternative source of income to promote financial independency and socioeconomic empowerment in the rural communities.

6. Conclusion

This work successfully demonstrates that a collaborative approach of academic organizations and NGOs can come forward and promote innovative sustainable agricultural practices like soilless agriculture for climate resilient production, thereby not only ensuring food security but also creating and alternative income opportunities by engaging women in a resource limited situation. This simultaneously alleviates the problems of food scarcity and malnutrition as well as promote women empowerment and gender equality, collectively contributing to United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals- SDG-2: Zero Hunger, SDG-5: Gender Equality and SDG-13: Climate Action.

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Crime Against Women: A Global Picture

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Abstract

Violence against women is a pervasive and persistent global phenomenon that often spans the life cycle of women. Despite differences in culture, region, and socio-economic context, women across the world experience systematic discrimination and gender-based violence in multitude of forms. Drawing upon historical perspectives, this paper examines the nature, stages, and evolving patterns of crimes committed against women. It highlights how such violence is rooted in historically unequal power relations and social structures. The paper further argues that legal measures alone are insufficient to combat gender-based violence. It asserts the fact that education is the most potent and sustainable remedy, enabling economic independence, social empowerment, political awareness, and intergenerational well-being, thereby suggesting a long-term pathway towards gender equality and empowerment.

Keywords: gender crime, violence against women, gender-based violence

1. Introduction

Women, who happen to constitute the “weaker” gender have to face problems irrespective of their caste, creed or colour, irrespective of their race, region, or religion, irrespective of their economic status or political belief or social condition. Researchers have shown that women all over the world face problems since or even ‘before’ their birth. I am consciously using the word ‘before’ keeping in mind thousands of cases of female foeticide or sex-selective abortion. Throughout their lives, no matter whether it is childhood or adolescence, youth or old age — women face different kinds of troubles and complications. Some of these troubles are solved with efforts from different quarters, some are partially solved, and some remain absolutely unsolved.

From the UNDP Human Development Reports, it is evident that women are discriminated against men everywhere—— at home, at workplace or even in the community. They are consistently deprived of their share in decision-making in domestic and external affairs. The picture is not much brighter in the western nations as well. But, in the developing countries like India such gender gaps are unequivocally naked regarding health, education, occupational opportunities, political awareness and participation, familial decision-making process and so on.

As a result of such alarmingly deplorable gender-gaps, gender-targeted crimes are enormously increasing in number. And, this has become a global phenomenon.

A gender crime may be defined as a hate crime committed against a specific gender, principally the feminine gender. Quite often gender crimes are committed during political instability and disturbances, civil wars or armed conflicts, within a nation. Some such examples include partition of Bengal and Punjab during 1947, Hindu-Muslim riots in India from 1946 to 1948, the Bangladesh War of Independence (1971), the Yugoslavian Civil War (1991-2002), Rwandan genocide in July, 1994, Israel-Hamas war since 2023, etc.

Though gender crimes are not universally recognized as a category of hate crimes, yet it is included in the United States as such a category, according to state and federal hate crime laws. Most of the gender crimes committed during times of war or war-like situations are internationally recognized as war-crimes, as per the Fourth Geneva Convention adopted in August 1949.

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women states that: “Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women”, and that “violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into subordinate position compared with men.” Kofi Annan, Secretary- General of the United Nations from 1997 to 2006 declared in 2006 Report posted on the United Nations

Development Fund for Women website that: “Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions. At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime with the abuser usually someone known to her.”

2. Crimes committed against women in various stages of life

The World Health Organization (WHO) in its research on violence or crime against women has categorized it as occurring through five basic stages of the life cycle of a woman, which are:

- pre-birth
- infancy
- girlhood
- adolescence and adulthood, and
- elderly

WHO has made a typology table regarding crimes targeted against women and the table shows that women are victims of various types of gender crime since or even before their birth.

Table 1: Gender crimes in the life-cycle of a woman

| PHASE | TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN |
|----------------------------------|---|
| In the Pre-birth period | (a) Female foeticide or sex-selective abortion, (b) Less antenatal care in case of a female foetus. |
| During Infancy | (a) Female infanticide, (b) Physical, sexual and psychological abuse. |
| During Girlhood | (a) Child Marriage, (b) Female genital mutilation (in some African and West Asian states), (c) Physical, sexual and psychological abuse, (d) Incest, (e) Child prostitution and pornography, (f) Trafficking in girls. |
| During Adolescence and Adulthood | (a) Dating and courtship violence (e.g., acid throwing and date rape), (b) Economically coerced sex with adolescent girls (e.g. school-girls having sex with “sugar daddies” in return for school fees), (c) Incest, (d) Sexual abuse in the workplace, (e) Rape, (f) Sexual harassment, (g) Forced prostitution and pornography, (h) Trafficking in women, (i) Partner violence, (j) Martial rape, (k) Dowry abuse and murder, (l) Partner homicide, (m) Psychological homicide, (n) Abuse of women with disabilities, (o) Forced pregnancy. |
| During Old Age | (a) Forced suicide or homicide of widows for economic reasons, (b) Deserting old and sick women, (c) Sexual, physical and psychological abuse, (d) Physical assaults of old women by close or distant relatives, (e) Witchcraft- related murder. |

From this, it is evident that violence against women is significantly encompassing. This is further reflected in the definition of gender related violence provided by the Istanbul Convention (11th May 2011) as stated below:

“Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

3. Types of violence against women: an evolutionary pattern

The history of violence against women is rather vague in scientific literature. A principal reason may be that a large number of different kinds of such violent activities including rape, sexual assault and domestic violence go unreported and underreported in most of the cases. There is a universal claim that throughout ages there were ‘lawful’ crimes against women. For instance, Roman Law gave men the right to chastise their wives, even to the point of death. Burning of ‘witches’ was allowed both by the State and the Church. The 18th Century English Common Law allowed a man to physically punish his wife using a stick no wider than his thumb. This ugly rule of punishment of wives prevailed in England and the U.S.A. till the late 19th century.

Some historians think that the history of gender targeted crimes is closely associated with the history of women being viewed as commodity and a gender role assigned to women, making them totally subordinate to men. Sometimes, explanation of patriarchy and an overall world system of status-quo (in which gender discrimination exists and is overtly or covertly encouraged) are cited to explain the history of gender related violence. In general, it is widely recognized that such violence exists everywhere and that, as expressed in the Report of the Secretary General of the United Nations, there is no region of the world, no country and no culture in which women’s freedom from violence has been secured.

At the same time, it is also largely believed that some forms of violence are particularly more prevalent in some parts of the Globe, quite often in the developing nations. For example, the association of dowry violence and bride burning is more common in countries like India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Acid throwing is more evident in countries mentioned just now and also some South-East Asian countries like Cambodia. Honour killing is more common in West Asia and South Asia with special emphasis on Northern India. Female genital mutilation is mostly found in some particular regions of Africa and to a lesser extent in some parts of West Asia.

Certain regions, although are associated with certain crimes against women, have stopped practicing them in recent times, while they are continued to be practiced in the rest. For instance, the case of honour killings. Though this ugly gender targeted crime has been stopped in Southern and Mediterranean Europe, it is still being nastily practised in India.

In 1870s American courts stopped recognizing the common-law principle that a husband had the right to physically chastise an errant wife. The first American state to deny this right was Albania in 1871. In the UK the traditional right of a husband to inflict moderate corporal punishment on his wife in order to keep her within the bounds of duty was removed in 1891. Since the 1990s and particularly since the beginning of the 21st century, there have been various gender-studies centres, increasing researches, sensitization programmes and awareness activities for the prevention of all kinds of gender targeted crimes or violence. It is now viewed both as a health issue as well as a total violation of human rights.

A 2002 study by Sarah Venis and Richard Horton has estimated that at least one out of five women all over the world has been physically and sexually abused by a man, sometimes in their lifetime. Gender-based violence accounts for as much death and ill-health for women aged 15-44 years as cancer, and is a greater cause of ill-health than malaria and traffic accidents combined. In some researches it appears that such violence is perpetrated by someone who is, by no means, a stranger to the woman. All researches on violence against women conclude that such violence

is a severe and omnipresent crime all over the world, with devastating effects on the health and well-being of both women and children.

4. Education as a potent weapon against gender violence

The question is: what is the remedy?

Thousands of statutes and legal enactments are there. But can they really mean anything to the millions of unfed, unclothed, shelterless marginalized women throughout the world? The answer is negative. We know it quite well that there is really no substitute for education that can bring that magic wand for women known as their economic freedom, without which women's enrichment, enlightenment, empowerment or emancipation ---- all become totally meaningless.

In this context it will be prudent to mention a study of two female researchers-- Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Valentine M. Moghadam. In a paper (2003) they have studied the conditions of women of the MENA (Middle East and North African) countries and categorically recognized the benefits of female education for women's empowerment and gender equality. They have arrived at five major conclusions which are as under:

- a. As female education rises, fertility, population growth and infant and child mortality fall, and consequently family health improves.
- b. Increases in girls' secondary school enrolment are associated with increases in women's participation in the labour force and their contributions to household and national income.
- c. Women's increased earning capacity has a positive effect on child nutrition.
- d. Daughters of educated mothers are more likely to be enrolled in schools and to have higher levels of educational attainment.
- e. Educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them. Hence, they get better treatment from their husbands which sets good examples for their children.

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Gender Bias in Artificial Intelligence: Implications for Equity and Inclusion

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Abstract

As artificial intelligence (AI) systems become increasingly embedded in daily life, concerns regarding their fairness and inclusivity have grown. One of the most pressing issues is gender bias in AI algorithms, which can reinforce and amplify societal stereotypes. This paper explores how gender bias enters AI systems, its manifestations across sectors such as employment, healthcare, and education, and its broader implications for gender equity. The study uses a mixed-methods approach—analyzing algorithmic behavior in selected applications and collecting qualitative insights from domain experts. Findings reveal significant disparities in algorithmic treatment of different genders, largely rooted in biased training data and insufficient diversity in AI development teams. The paper concludes by proposing a framework for gender-inclusive AI design and policy interventions to ensure equity and fairness.

Keywords: AI Development, Algorithmic Fairness, Artificial Intelligence, Equity, Gender Bias, Gender Disparities, Inclusion, Policy Interventions, Societal Stereotypes, Training Data

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transitioned from a speculative vision to a ubiquitous force shaping modern society. From powering virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa to driving decision-making in recruitment, healthcare, education, and criminal justice, AI systems are integral to how we navigate daily life (Bolukbasi et al., 2016). However, as AI's influence grows, so too does scrutiny of its ethical implications, particularly its potential to perpetuate and amplify societal biases. Among these, gender bias stands out as a critical issue with far-reaching consequences for equity and inclusion (Gebru, 2020). Gender bias in AI refers to the tendency of algorithms to produce outcomes that unfairly discriminate against individuals based on gender, often mirroring or exacerbating existing societal stereotypes (Benjamin, 2019). This phenomenon is not merely a technical glitch but a socio-technical challenge rooted in the interplay of data, design, and deployment practices (Dartin, 2018; D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020; Eubanks, 2018)

The roots of gender bias in AI are multifaceted. At its core, AI systems learn from vast datasets that often reflect historical and cultural inequalities. For instance, training data drawn from male-dominated fields or biased media representations can embed stereotypes into algorithms, leading to outputs that favor one gender over another (West et al., 2019). A well-known example is the case of word embeddings, where terms like "man" are associated with high-status professions like "engineer," while "woman" is linked to roles like "nurse" or "homemaker." Such biases are not confined to language models; they manifest in facial recognition systems that misidentify women or gender-diverse individuals, hiring algorithms that penalize female candidates, and healthcare systems that provide suboptimal recommendations for non-male patients (West et al., 2019). These outcomes highlight a critical flaw: AI systems, often perceived as objective, are deeply influenced by the subjective realities of their creators and the data they use (West et al., 2019; Zou & Schiebinger, 2018).

The implications of gender bias in AI extend beyond individual harm to broader societal inequities. In employment, biased algorithms can limit opportunities for women and gender-diverse individuals, perpetuating wage gaps and occupational segregation (Obermeyer et al., 2019). In healthcare, gender-biased AI can lead to misdiagnoses or inadequate treatment plans, disproportionately affecting women and non-binary individuals who already face systemic disparities in medical care. In education, AI-driven tools may reinforce stereotypes by recommending gendered career paths or academic tracks (Caliskan et al., 2017; Gebru, 2020). These examples underscore the

urgency of addressing gender bias, not only to ensure fairness but also to uphold the credibility of AI as a tool for progress (Benjamin, 2019; Costanza-Chock, 2020).

Moreover, the lack of diversity in AI development exacerbates these issues. The technology sector remains predominantly male, with women and gender-diverse individuals underrepresented in roles that shape AI systems (Hao, 2020). This homogeneity limits the perspectives brought to problem formulation, algorithm design, and testing, allowing biases to go unchecked. Additionally, commercial pressures often prioritize speed and efficiency over ethical considerations, sidelining efforts to address fairness (Raji & Buolamwini, 2019). As AI continues to shape critical domains, the need for gender-inclusive systems becomes both an ethical and practical imperative (Raji & Buolamwini, 2019).

This study aims to dissect the mechanisms through which gender bias infiltrates AI, examine its impacts across key sectors, and propose actionable solutions for fostering equity. By combining quantitative analysis of AI applications with qualitative insights from experts, the research seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the problem (Mittelstadt et al., 2016). The objectives are threefold: to identify the forms and prevalence of gender bias in AI, to uncover the socio-technical factors driving these biases, and to develop a framework for gender-inclusive AI design (Barocas and Selbst, 2016). Addressing gender bias in AI is not just about refining algorithms; it is about reimagining the values and priorities that guide technological innovation (Angwin et al., 2016). By doing so, we can ensure that AI serves as a tool for inclusion rather than a perpetuator of inequity (Selbst et al., 2019).

2. Literature Review

A growing body of interdisciplinary research has demonstrated that Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems can replicate, reinforce, and even exacerbate gender bias that exists in society. These biases are not accidental anomalies but structural outcomes of how AI is conceptualized, developed, trained, and deployed. One seminal study by Bolukbasi et al. (2016) found that word embeddings—mathematical representations of words used in Natural Language Processing (NLP)—trained on the Google News corpus exhibited deeply rooted gender stereotypes: the model associated the word “man” with professions such as “computer programmer” and “woman” with “homemaker” (Bolukbasi et al., 2016). This association is not merely linguistic but profoundly socio-political, revealing how historical and cultural narratives influence machine understanding.

A widely publicized case illustrating the real-world consequences of such bias involved Amazon’s AI-based hiring tool, which was trained on a decade’s worth of resumes submitted to the company. The model systematically downgraded resumes that included the word “women’s,” such as “women’s chess club captain” or “women in tech initiative,” simply because it had learned from historical hiring data in which male applicants were favored (Dastin, 2018). Although Amazon eventually abandoned the tool, the incident underscores the urgent need to critically examine the pipelines that feed AI systems and the underlying sociotechnical assumptions that drive their deployment (Eubanks, 2018).

Numerous studies have since reinforced these concerns across various domains. In facial recognition, research by Buolamwini and Gebru revealed that commercial gender classification systems had error rates of up to 34.7% for darker-skinned women, compared to only 0.8% for lighter-skinned men (Buolamwini & Gebru 2018). Such disparities in performance are not just technical flaws—they have serious implications for surveillance, public safety, and human rights (Crawford, 2021).

The literature identifies several core causes behind the prevalence of gender bias in AI systems:

1. **Data Bias:** Training data is often male-dominated, heteronormative, or exclusionary of non-binary, transgender, and gender-diverse identities. Historical data reflects patriarchal norms and systemic exclusion, leading to non-representative datasets that encode outdated gender roles (Binns, 2018). For instance, job advertisements used in training AI models may emphasize stereotypically male traits such as “dominant” or “aggressive,” leading to algorithmic discouragement of female applicants (Lambrecht & Tucker 2019).

2. **Design Bias:** AI development teams are frequently homogeneous, predominantly composed of men from similar socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (West et al, 2019). This lack of diversity in design teams limits the breadth of perspectives and leads to blind spots in identifying and correcting biased assumptions (Noble, 2018). When lived experiences of women and marginalized genders are missing from the development process, products fail to reflect the needs and rights of all users (Keyes, 2019).
3. **Application Bias:** AI systems are too often deployed without rigorous testing for gender fairness, particularly in high-stakes applications like healthcare, hiring, and law enforcement (Raji & Buolamwini, 2019). In clinical settings, AI tools designed to detect cardiac conditions tend to be more accurate for men, due to their training on predominantly male datasets (Obermeyer et al., 2019). Similarly, predictive policing algorithms have been shown to over-target communities based on biased historical arrest records, disproportionately affecting women of color and gender-nonconforming individuals (Angwin et al., 2016).
4. **Interpretation and Feedback Bias:** Even when systems are updated or retrained, they often lack mechanisms for continuous monitoring and public accountability (Selbst & Barocas, 2018). Users rarely have visibility into how decisions are made, which limits recourse for those harmed by biased predictions (Veale & Binns, 2017).

To address these multilayered issues, scholars and practitioners advocate for transparency, inclusivity, and fairness as foundational principles in AI development. Transparent AI means that systems must be auditable, explainable, and open to public scrutiny (Diakopoulos, 2016). Inclusive AI demands intersectional approaches that incorporate voices from women, LGBTQ+ individuals, racial minorities, and other underrepresented groups in every stage—from problem framing and dataset construction to model deployment and post-hoc evaluation (Costanza-Chock, 2020). Equitable AI ensures that algorithmic outcomes do not reinforce structural inequalities, but instead serve to correct them through affirmative design and justice-centered frameworks (Barocas et al., 2019).

Moreover, policy interventions are essential to institutionalize these changes. Governments and regulatory bodies must implement standards for algorithmic accountability, support the creation of gender-balanced data repositories, and incentivize inclusive innovation in tech industries (European Commission, 2020). Educational institutions must integrate ethics, gender studies, and critical data literacy into computer science curricula to prepare a generation of socially responsible AI professionals (UNESCO, 2021).

In summary, while AI holds immense potential to transform society, its deployment must not come at the cost of deepening existing gender disparities. The need for equitable, accountable, and inclusive AI systems has never been more urgent, and achieving this goal requires collaborative action across academia, industry, government, and civil society.

3. Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the presence and types of gender bias in selected AI applications.
2. To understand the socio-technical factors contributing to gender bias in AI.
3. To propose strategies for creating gender-inclusive AI systems.

4. Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was adopted:

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Three widely-used AI applications (a resume screener, a voice assistant, and a healthcare chatbot) were tested using gendered input data to assess bias.
- **Qualitative Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 experts in AI development, ethics, and gender studies.

Sampling: Purposive sampling was used for selecting AI systems and experts.

Data Analysis

- Quantitative data was analyzed for variance in outcomes based on gendered inputs.
- Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts to identify recurring patterns and insights.

5. Findings

5.1 Gender Disparities in AI Output

- The resume screener showed preference for male-associated terms (e.g., “leader,” “assertive”) over gender-neutral or female-associated terms.
- Voice assistants (like Siri and Alexa) defaulted to female-sounding voices and were more likely to respond submissively to abusive language.
- The healthcare chatbot often offered less assertive treatment recommendations when presented with female patient profiles, indicating a medical gender bias.

5.2 Contributing Factors

- Dataset Composition: Training datasets were disproportionately male-centric.
- Lack of Gender Sensitivity Training: AI developers admitted limited awareness of gender as a factor in algorithm design.
- Commercial Pressures: Companies prioritized performance over fairness, often ignoring ethical implications.

6. Discussion

The findings confirm a critical and often unsettling truth: Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems are not immune to the deeply embedded biases of the societies in which they are conceptualized, developed, and deployed. Despite common perceptions of AI as objective or impartial, the reality is quite the opposite. These technologies—far from being neutral arbiters—frequently act as mirrors of existing social structures and, in many cases, magnifiers of gender inequalities. They do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they are shaped by the data they are trained on, the cultural assumptions of their creators, and the structural inequalities that pervade our institutions.

One of the most alarming consequences of this dynamic is the reinforcement of gender disparities in critical areas of life, such as employment, healthcare, education, and civic participation. For example, AI-powered resume screening tools that are trained on historical hiring data may internalize and perpetuate the biases of past decisions. If a company has historically favored male candidates, its AI systems may learn to downgrade resumes with indicators of a female identity, such as women’s names, female-coded activities, or career breaks for maternity. As a result, qualified female and gender-diverse applicants may be unfairly filtered out, reinforcing the “glass ceiling” in hiring processes and undermining workplace diversity efforts.

Moreover, the widespread use of stereotypical voice assistants (such as those that default to female names and voices and are programmed to respond in polite or submissive tones) subtly but powerfully normalizes outdated gender roles. These design choices symbolically reinforce the notion that women are more suited to subservient or caregiving roles, thereby shaping user expectations and societal norms in regressive ways. This is not just a design flaw—it is a cultural signal with lasting psychological and sociological consequences.

The ramifications extend to life-or-death scenarios in healthcare and medicine. AI-driven diagnostic tools and chatbots, when trained on data that predominantly represents male patients, often fail to accurately detect symptoms in women. Studies have shown that gender bias in clinical datasets can lead to underdiagnosis or misdiagnosis of conditions like heart disease in women, whose symptoms frequently differ from those of men. Similarly, gender-diverse individuals, whose healthcare needs are already underserved, are further marginalized by systems that lack inclusive data and understanding. This not only violates principles of equity and medical ethics but deepens existing health disparities.

Addressing these entrenched biases requires more than just technical fixes. While improving algorithmic fairness through techniques such as balanced and representative datasets, bias audits, and inclusive model training is essential, it is not sufficient. The root causes of these biases lie not only in data but also in the cultural and institutional frameworks within which AI is developed. Thus, systemic and structural reform is crucial. To that end, gender inclusion must be woven into every stage of the AI development lifecycle—from the initial framing of the problem to data collection, model design, testing, deployment, and post-deployment monitoring. This involves asking fundamental questions: Who is defining the problem? Whose voices are being included in the design process? What assumptions underlie the data? Who benefits, and who is at risk? It also requires diverse teams of developers, ethicists, sociologists, and end-users, especially women and marginalized gender groups, to collaboratively shape AI systems that reflect a broad spectrum of experiences and needs.

Furthermore, policy interventions and regulatory frameworks play a vital role in enforcing accountability and transparency in AI systems. Governments and international organizations must mandate equity audits, enforce non-discrimination laws in algorithmic decision-making, and promote the development of ethical AI guidelines. Public funding for AI research should prioritize inclusive practices and incentivize innovations that address social justice goals.

In parallel, education and capacity-building efforts are needed to cultivate a generation of AI practitioners who are not only technically proficient but also ethically conscious and socially aware. Embedding gender studies and ethics into computer science curricula, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, and fostering inclusive leadership within tech organizations are key steps toward this transformation.

In conclusion, AI systems are only as fair, inclusive, and humane as the societies and institutions that create them. Without intentional efforts to challenge societal stereotypes, correct historical imbalances, and promote gender equity in technology, we risk building digital infrastructures that entrench injustice rather than dismantle it. It is both a moral imperative and a practical necessity to ensure that AI contributes to a more just, inclusive, and equitable future for all genders.

7. Recommendations

To promote gender-equitable AI, the following measures are proposed:

1. **Inclusive Data Practices:** Curate balanced and diverse training datasets that represent all gender identities.
2. **Diverse Development Teams:** Ensure gender diversity in AI research and engineering teams.
3. **Bias Audits:** Mandate regular bias testing of AI systems, particularly in sensitive domains.
4. **Gender-Inclusive Design Guidelines:** Develop protocols that embed equity from the design phase.
5. **Policy Interventions:** Governments and regulatory bodies should enforce standards for ethical AI development.

8. Conclusion

AI holds transformative potential, but only if it works equitably for all. Gender bias in AI is a significant obstacle to achieving digital inclusion and social justice. By identifying sources of bias and proposing actionable solutions, this study contributes to the growing discourse on responsible AI. Gender-inclusive AI is not only an ethical imperative—it is essential for the credibility and utility of technology in the 21st century.

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Gender Justice and Acceptability for the LGBTQ Community in Kolkata

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Abstract

Despite advancing legal frameworks, the LGBTQ+ community continues to confront deeply entrenched social taboos rooted in heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies. These stigmas manifest as systemic discrimination and spatial injustice, profoundly shaping the urban experience of queer individuals. This paper investigates the spatial injustice and social stigma experienced by the LGBTQ+ community in Kolkata. The study's primary objectives are to contour the spatial segregation faced by queer individuals, unveil the societal taboos underpinning this exclusion, and identify pathways toward a more equitable city. Employing a mixed-method approach, this research draws on quantitative and qualitative data from 392 long-term LGBTQ+ residents through questionnaires and interviews. The findings reveal a significant disconnect between progressive legislation and the community's lived reality, which remains characterized by forced residential clustering, pervasive fear, and systemic discrimination. The analysis confirms that patriarchal norms are physically inscribed onto the urban landscape. The study concludes that achieving genuine urban equity necessitates a multi-pronged strategy, integrating gender-neutral urban design, comprehensive public education, and robust anti-discrimination policies to transform both the physical and social fabric of the city.

Keywords: LGBTQ, Injustice, Segregation, Discrimination

1. Introduction

The global discourse surrounding identity has increasingly challenged traditional, binary understandings of gender, paving the way for a more fluid and inclusive perspective. In India, this evolution is marked by a tumultuous legislative journey, from colonial-era laws criminalizing non-normative sexuality to landmark rulings and the eventual passage of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. Despite this legal progress, the lived reality for many Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) individuals remains fraught with social and psychological challenges. These challenges are not abstract; they are etched into the very geography of our cities (Nadal, 2019). The urban landscape, often designed around cisgender and heteronormative assumptions, can become a site of exclusion and conflict. This exclusion gives rise to forceful **spatial segregation**, where marginalized communities are relegated to specific enclaves, either for safety or due to systemic barriers in housing and social acceptance (Doan, 2015). The antidote to such segregation is the conscious development of **gender-neutral urban spaces**. This concept moves beyond mere tolerance and envisions an urban fabric where infrastructure, public services, and community areas are designed to be safe and accessible for all, irrespective of gender identity or sexual orientation. It involves everything from gender-neutral public restrooms to community centers that are visibly and unapologetically inclusive, fostering integration rather than isolation. This study delves into these dynamics within the metropolitan context of Kolkata, a city with a significant LGBTQ+ population (Rice, 2019). By examining the direct, long-term experiences of its queer residents, this paper investigates the profound socio-psychological dilemmas that arise from spatial segregation. It aims to scrutinize how physical space shapes mental well-being and, by applying post-modern gender ideologies, proposes pathways toward creating a genuinely gender-neutral city that champions equity and belonging for all its inhabitants (Huchting and Fisher, 2019).

2. Objectives

This research is guided by three primary objectives. First, it seeks to unveil the persistent taboos related to gender binary stereotypes that operate within urban society, creating invisible yet powerful barriers for the LGBTQ+ community. Second, the study aims to contour the specific spatial injustices and restrictions faced by queer individuals, mapping out how social prejudices translate into physical exclusion and segregation within the city. Finally, this paper endeavours to identify a clear way of progress by exploring how the implementation of gender neutrality in public policy, urban design, and social consciousness can dismantle these barriers and foster a more equitable society.

3. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive and analytical research design, utilizing a mixed-method approach to investigate the socio-psychological dilemmas and spatial segregation of the LGBTQ+ community in Kolkata. The methodology is systematically structured through sampling, data collection, and a multi-tiered analytical framework. The study area is the city of Kolkata. A non-probability sampling method, specifically a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, was utilized to recruit participants. This technique was deemed most appropriate for reaching a marginalized and often hard-to-access population. The initial participants were identified through collaboration with local LGBTQ+ community-based organizations.

The final sample size consists of **N=392** individuals who met the following inclusion criteria:

- a. Self-identification as a member of the LGBTQ+ community.
- b. Continuous residence within the Kolkata metropolitan area for a minimum of ten years.

This ensures that the collected data reflects long-term, lived experiences of the urban environment. Primary data was collected through direct, semi-structured interviews.

A structured questionnaire was administered to quantify participant opinions and experiences. The instrument comprised **12 items** measured on a **7-point Likert scale**, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). These items were designed to assess three core domains:

- **Perceived Causes of Gender Rigidity:** Questions exploring the role of patriarchy, lack of sex education, media misrepresentation, and defamation of women.
- **Factors of Social Progress:** Items assessing the perceived impact of social media, NGOs, the decriminalization of Article 377, and the emergence of gender-neutral spaces.
- **Experiences of Fear and Exclusion:** Items measuring personal experiences with family exclusion, verbal abuse, and the fear of physical abuse or job loss.

3.1 Reliability Testing

To ensure the internal consistency and reliability of the 12-item scale, a **Cronbach's Alpha (α)** test was conducted. This test measures how closely related the set of items are as a group, indicating whether they reliably measure the same latent construct (e.g., perceived social hostility).

The collected data was coded and analyzed using a quantitative framework to test relationships between variables.

3.2 Test of Association (Chi-Square Test): To determine if a statistically significant association exists between key categorical variables, the Chi-Square (χ^2) test of independence was employed. The formula is:

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

Equation 1

Where,

O = Observed frequency in a category.

E = Expected frequency in a category under the null hypothesis.

A p-value of < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

4. Study Area

Kolkata had been selected as a study area because of its unique socio-demographic landscape. Primarily, the city is home to a substantial and officially recognized LGBTQ+ population, estimated at approximately 30,000 individuals by the West Bengal Transgender Development Board (2022). This significant demographic concentration provides a robust foundation for empirical research and ensures a viable sample size for meaningful analysis. Furthermore, Kolkata presents a tangible and observable case of the core phenomenon under investigation: spatial segregation. The identification of distinct residential areas inhabited predominantly by the LGBTQ+ community offers a clear, real-world example of how social exclusion is mapped onto the urban fabric. This allows the research to move beyond theoretical discussion and engage directly with the geographical realities of queer life. As a major metropolitan hub with a rich history of social reform and activism, Kolkata provides a complex and layered context. The presence of a long-standing community, evidenced by the study's focus on residents of at least a decade, enables an in-depth exploration of the long-term socio-psychological impacts of this segregation. Therefore, Kolkata serves as an ideal microcosm for examining these dynamics in urban India.

5. Result and Discussion

5.1 LGBTQ views and voices

A structured questionnaire survey to get the views regarding various aspects which can affect LGBTQ daily life and their daily experiences have been done. The total number of key dimensions taken are twelve. The respondents gave their verdict on the questions on seven points likert's scale. In that scale 1 denotes complete disagreement with the issue and 7 stands for complete agreement with the matter of concern. For the reliability analysis of those questions Cornbach's alpha value have been calculated. The analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .814 (Table 2), which is well above the standard threshold for high reliability (Table 1). This very strong result confirms that the 12 questions worked together cohesively to measure the community's perceptions, ensuring that the findings are both valid and trustworthy.

The set of 12 questions is as following:

1. Is Indian age-old patriarchy responsible for this gender rigidity?
2. Does Lack of Sex education and awareness lead to gender rigidity?
3. Does Miss representation of LGBTQ in Media lead to gender rigidity?
4. Does Defamation of women lead to gender rigidity?
5. Did Social-Media help to break these social taboos?
6. Does NGO working with Transgenders prove helpful?
7. Article 377 helped the LGBTQ people a lot.
8. Gender neutral spaces are coming up.
9. Does Exclusion from family make LGBTQ people miserable?
10. Verbal abuse at public places is a common phenomenon.
11. Fear of Physical abuse exists within LGBTQ people.
12. Fear of Job loss makes LGBTQ people insecure.

Table 1: Case Summary

| | | N | % |
|-------|-----------|-----|-------|
| Cases | Valid | 215 | 100.0 |
| | Excludeda | 0 | .0 |
| | Total | 215 | 100.0 |

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|------------------|--|------------|
| .814 | .806 | 12 |

Table 3: Item Statistics

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|------|------|----------------|-----|
| Q_1 | 6.20 | .990 | 215 |
| Q_2 | 6.13 | 1.045 | 215 |
| Q_3 | 5.71 | 1.077 | 215 |
| Q_4 | 5.40 | 1.509 | 215 |
| Q_5 | 5.09 | 1.301 | 215 |
| Q_6 | 5.00 | 1.186 | 215 |
| Q_7 | 5.78 | 1.337 | 215 |
| Q_8 | 5.78 | 1.082 | 215 |
| Q_9 | 5.29 | 1.357 | 215 |
| Q_10 | 5.49 | 1.367 | 215 |
| Q_11 | 5.73 | 1.235 | 215 |
| Q_12 | 5.00 | 1.186 | 215 |

The analysis of the item statistics reveals a clear and compelling narrative about the community's lived reality, marked by a deep understanding of systemic issues, a tangible fear for personal safety, and a nuanced view of social progress. Respondents overwhelmingly identified that **Indian age-old patriarchy (Q1)** as the primary driver of gender rigidity, giving it a mean score of **6.20 out of 7** –one of the highest in the survey. This systemic issue translates into a direct and profound threat, with the **Fear of Physical abuse (Q11)** registering a very high mean of **5.73**. This is the study's most critical finding. The community does not see social hostility as random but as a direct consequence of a patriarchal structure, and this manifests most acutely as a pervasive fear of physical violence (Table 3).

A highly significant and optimistic finding is the community's perception of recent progress. The positive impact of the **decriminalization of Article 377 (Q7)** and the emergence of **Gender-neutral spaces (Q8)** received identically high mean scores of 5.78. This identical score is statistically striking and socially significant. It suggests that in the minds of the respondents, the landmark legal victory is inextricably linked to the tangible creation of safe, gender-neutral environments. One is seen as the direct and positive outcome of the other, representing the most impactful area of progress (Forstie, 2020).

Despite the optimism surrounding legal progress, significant challenges remain at a personal level. **Exclusion from family (Q9)** remains a major issue, with a high mean score of **5.29**. The experience of **Verbal abuse at public place (Q10)** is also highly prevalent, scoring a mean of **5.49**. This highlights a crucial disconnect. While macro-level legal and spatial progress is celebrated, it has not yet translated into universal acceptance within the most intimate social units (the family) or eliminated hostility in public spaces. The struggle for personal acceptance and safety is far from over (Jackson, 2017).

5.2 Acceptance by the society

A Chi-Square test for independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and acceptance levels. The results indicate a highly significant association between the two variables (Table 4).

The key statistics from the test are:

- Pearson Chi-Square (χ^2) value: 28.765
- Degrees of Freedom (df): 2
- Significance (p-value): $p < .001$

Since the p-value is less than the standard alpha level of .05, we reject the null hypothesis of independence. This confirms that the observed differences in acceptance levels between male and female respondents are not due to random chance. The validity of this test is supported by the fact that no cells had an expected count less than 5.

Table 4: Gender * Acceptance Crosstabulation

| | | Acceptance | | | Total | |
|--------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|------------|-------|-----------------|
| | | | Complete_ Acceptance | Hesitation | | Non_ Acceptance |
| Gender | Female | Count | 99 | 51 | 35 | 185 |
| | | Expected Count | 77.8 | 74.6 | 32.5 | 185.0 |
| | Male | Count | 47 | 89 | 26 | 162 |
| | | Expected Count | 68.2 | 65.4 | 28.5 | 162.0 |
| Total | Count | 146 | 140 | 61 | 347 | |
| | Expected Count | 146.0 | 140.0 | 61.0 | 347.0 | |

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | Monte Carlo Sig. (2-sided) | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| | | | | Sig. | 99% Confidence Interval | |
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 28.765 ^a | 2 | .000 | .000 ^b | .000 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 29.185 | 2 | .000 | .000 ^b | .000 | .000 |
| Fisher's Exact Test | 28.979 | | | .000 ^b | .000 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 347 | | | | | |

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 28.48.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000.

To understand the nature of this significant relationship, the observed and expected counts in the crosstabulation table were examined (Table 5). The analysis shows distinct patterns for each gender. Female Respondents showed a much higher inclination towards Complete Acceptance than expected (Observed Count = 99 vs. Expected Count = 77.8). Conversely, far fewer female respondents expressed Hesitation than expected (Observed = 51 vs. Expected = 74.6). Male Respondents displayed the opposite pattern. They were significantly more likely to express Hesitation than expected (Observed = 89 vs. Expected = 65.4). Correspondingly, they were far less likely to show Complete Acceptance than expected (Observed = 47 vs. Expected = 68.2). In essence, female respondents were disproportionately more accepting, while male respondents

were disproportionately more hesitant towards the LGBTQ+ community (Pierson, 2020).

Table 6: Symmetric Measures

| | Value | Approx. Sig. | Monte Carlo Sig. | | |
|--------------------|-------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| | | | Sig. | 99% Confidence Interval | |
| | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Nominal by Phi | .288 | .000 | .000 ^c | .000 | .000 |
| Nominal Cramer's V | .288 | .000 | .000 ^c | .000 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 347 | | | | |

c. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000.

While the relationship is statistically significant, it's also important to understand its strength or effect size. The Cramer's V value, which measures the strength of association for tables larger than 2x2, was .288. According to common conventions, this value indicates a moderate strength of association. This means that while gender is a significant factor in predicting attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community, it is one of several potential factors influencing this perspective (Woulfe and Goodman, 2021). The results provide strong evidence that gender is significantly associated with acceptance levels, with females demonstrating higher acceptance and males demonstrating greater hesitation (Table 6, Figure 1). This gender-based divergence underscores the complexity of the societal landscape. While nearly half the population demonstrates full support, an equally large segment remains uncertain or hesitant, indicating that the journey towards unequivocal social acceptance for the LGBTQ+ community is ongoing and requires bridging a considerable gap in perspective, particularly among the male demographic (Hudson and Romanelli, 2020).

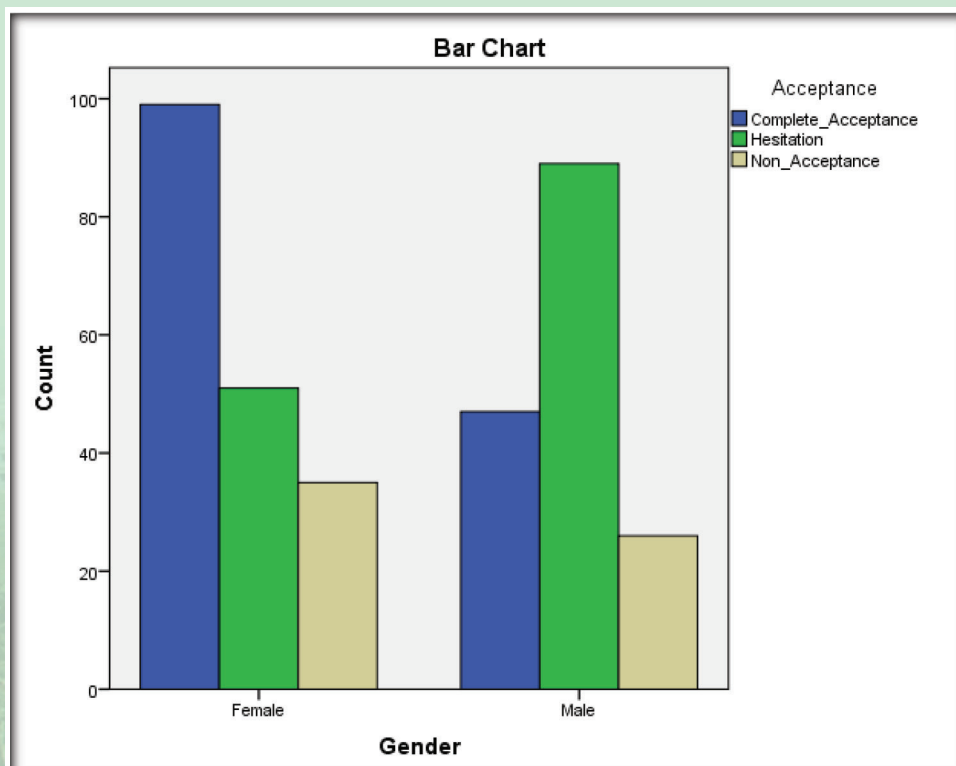


Figure 1: Societal Acceptance

5.3 Spatial Injustice towards LGBTQ

The spatial distribution of LGBTQ residences in Kolkata, as depicted in the provided GPS survey map, offers a stark visualization of spatial injustice and the tangible effects of social stigma

(Figure 2). The distinct clustering of residences, rather than a dispersed and integrated pattern, indicates a forced segregation that confines the community to specific urban pockets. This geographical marginalization is not a product of choice but a direct consequence of systemic discrimination within the housing market, where landlords and resident associations often deny accommodation based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Such exclusionary practices relegate the LGBTQ community to the urban periphery or less desirable neighbourhoods, limiting their access to resources, services, and opportunities, thereby perpetuating a cycle of socioeconomic disadvantage (Ristock and Timbang, 2005). From a postmodernist perspective, these clusters can be understood as ‘heterotopias,’ as conceptualized by Michel Foucault—spaces that exist outside the dominant societal norms, functioning simultaneously as sites of refuge and confinement (Mendlein, 2016). While these enclaves may foster a sense of community and solidarity, their existence is predicated on exclusion from the city’s normative spaces. Furthermore, Edward Soja’s concept of ‘Third space’ allows for an interpretation of these clusters as lived, socially produced spaces of resistance against a heteronormative urban fabric. However, this production of space is heavily constrained by the overarching power structures that dictate where and how marginalized communities are allowed to exist (Bowling, 2020). The map, therefore, transcends its function as a mere cartographic representation; it becomes a critical text that reveals how social power and prejudice are inscribed onto the urban landscape, creating geographies of exclusion that profoundly impact the lives and well-being of the LGBTQ population in Kolkata (Frost and Meyer, 2012). The spatial arrangement is a direct testament to the societal failure to ensure equitable access to the city for all its citizens, regardless of their identity (Bond and Miller, 2024).

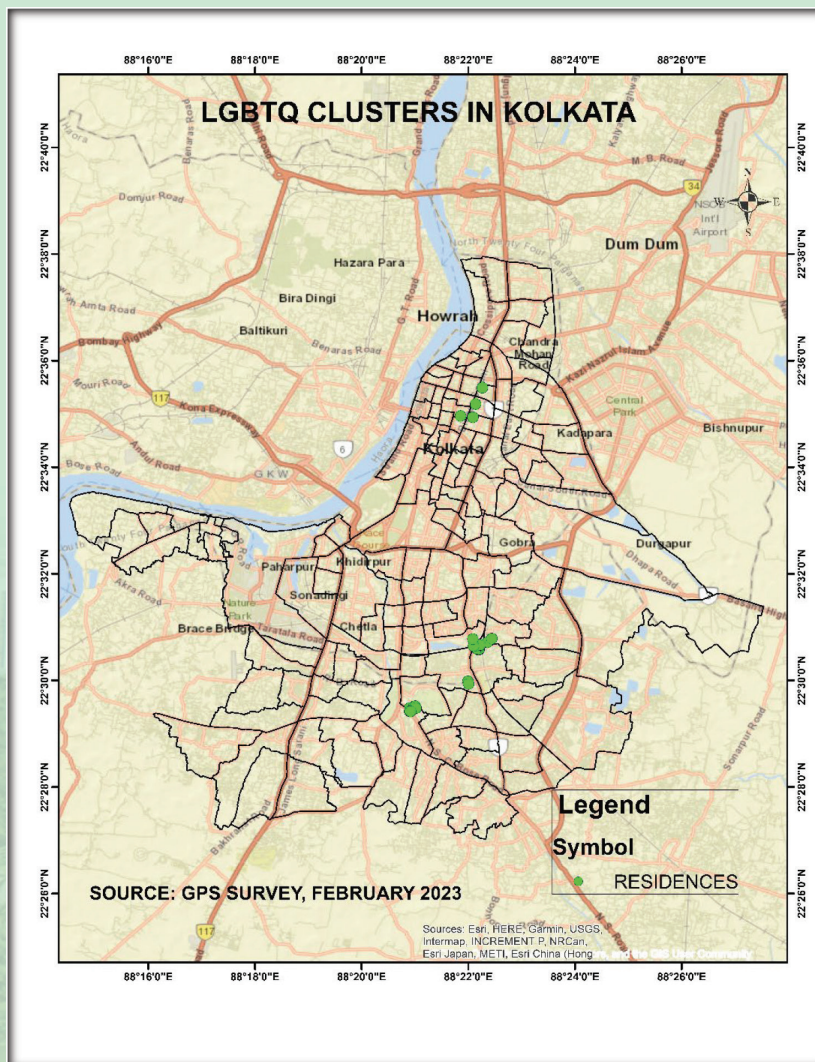


Figure 2: LGBTQ Residences in Kolkata, 2023

6. Some Avenues to explore

6.1. Develop Gender-Neutral Urban Spaces

A primary strategy is the conscious development of gender-neutral urban infrastructure, which provides tangible signals of inclusivity and safety. This involves creating gender-neutral public restrooms to remove a significant source of anxiety and potential conflict for transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals (Zajac and Godshall, 2020). Furthermore, establishing community centres that are explicitly and visibly inclusive can provide safe havens, foster a sense of belonging, and serve as hubs for resources, support groups, and cultural events (Lawley, 2019).

6.2 Promote Education and Awareness

Given that the study identifies a lack of education as a root cause of gender rigidity, promoting widespread awareness is essential. Implementing comprehensive and inclusive sex education in schools and public forums can help dismantle stereotypes and foster understanding from a young age. This should be complemented by public awareness campaigns that challenge patriarchal norms and counter the media misrepresentation that the research identified as a significant problem, ensuring a more accurate and affirming portrayal of the LGBTQ+ community (Heath and Keene, 2023; Burrows, 2022).

6.3 Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks

While the paper celebrates legal progress like the decriminalization of Article 377, the work is not finished. It is crucial to enact and rigorously enforce strong anti-discrimination laws covering housing, employment, and public services to combat the systemic barriers that lead to spatial segregation. Concurrently, increasing funding and support for the NGOs that the research found to be helpful can amplify their impact and extend their reach within the community (Roberts and Christens, 2021; Kalb, 2021).

6.4 Address Social and Familial Exclusion

The research highlights a disconnect where legal progress has not yet translated into personal acceptance. To bridge this gap, creating resources and support systems for families of LGBTQ+ individuals can help foster understanding at the most intimate level, addressing the profound misery caused by family exclusion. In the public sphere, implementing clear policies and penalties to address and deter the common experience of verbal abuse can make urban environments tangibly safer and more welcoming for everyone (Watts, 2021).

6.5 Engage Men in the Conversation

A critical and specific finding from the study was the significant hesitation and lower acceptance rates among male respondents compared to females. This points to a clear need for targeted outreach. Developing programs and campaigns specifically aimed at educating the male demographic about gender diversity and LGBTQ+ rights is a crucial step for bridging this perspective gap and achieving broader, more unequivocal societal acceptance (Prescott, 2024; Jacobson, 2024).

7. Conclusion

This study illuminates the profound and multifaceted nature of spatial injustice as experienced by the LGBTQ+ community in Kolkata. The research unequivocally demonstrates that social stigma and deep-seated patriarchal norms are not abstract concepts but are physically inscribed onto the urban landscape, resulting in forced residential segregation and a pervasive climate of fear. While landmark legal reforms represent a critical step forward, their impact is fundamentally limited without corresponding shifts in social attitudes and the built environment. The findings confirm that a chasm exists between legislative progress and the lived realities of queer individuals, who continue to face familial exclusion, public harassment, and systemic discrimination. True urban equity requires a holistic and proactive approach. The creation of gender-neutral spaces, the promotion of comprehensive education, the strengthening of anti-discrimination policies,

and targeted engagement with hesitant demographics are not merely recommendations but essential pillars for dismantling the architecture of exclusion. Ultimately, fostering a genuinely inclusive city demands a collective commitment to transforming both the physical spaces and the social consciousness of the urban domain, ensuring that Kolkata can become a place of safety, acceptance, and belonging for all its citizens, irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

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Negating the Binary: An Intersectional Study of Gender Dysphoria, Gender Socialization and School Curriculum

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the multidimensional concept of gender dysphoria through a biological, psychological, and sociological lens. The misinterpretation and interchangeable use of gender and sex has been foregrounded, underlining gender as a socially constructed identity shaped by cultural norms, socialization, and institutional influences whereas sex as a biological construct that is assigned at birth. A qualitative approach grounded in social constructivism and intersectionality is adopted to analyse the development of gender dysphoria in individuals. The prime focus lies on the role of gender socialization in amplifying psychological distress among individuals whose identities diverge from societal expectations. The paper also speculates the critical role of school curricula in either reinforcing binary gender norms or fostering inclusive environments that validate diverse gender identities. The study highlights the potential of an inclusive curriculum reform in mitigating the mental health challenges associated with gender dysphoria. The findings underline the urgent need for curricular reform, changes in social and educational systems to breed empathetic, affirming, conducive spaces that support gender-diverse individuals and promote holistic well-being of individuals.

Keywords: Gender Dysphoria, Mental Health, Gender Socialization, School Curriculum

1. Introduction

The term gender is often interchangeably used to refer to sex of an individual overshadowing the fact that Gender is a sociological construct while Sex is a biological construct. The concept of Gender is not merely a biological categorization but a complex interplay of roles, expression, identity construction, and expectations shaped through socialisation and the environment to which an individual belongs. Though societal norms have been pervasive in conforming to the traditional gender roles yet increasing attention is now paid to the impact that these social constructs can have on individuals whose internal sense of self does not align with societal expectations or their assigned sex at birth. This incongruence is called gender dysphoria which challenges cisgender (congruence of gender identity with assigned sex), revealing important intersections between gender socialisation and individual identity.

Gender dysphoria refers to the psychological distress that arises from a discrepancy between an individual's sense of assigned sex at birth and their experienced or expressed gender identity. It is believed to have derived from a sexual differentiation in the brain. This condition is formally recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), where it is distinguished from broader transgender identities by the presence of significant emotional or functional impairment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

2. Understanding the Idea of Gender Dysphoria

Gender dysphoria as a concept, evolved over time and it was originally labelled as 'gender identity disorder'. The terminology was later revised in the DSM-5 to avoid stigma of it being a 'disorder' and emphasize on the distress and chaos that originates in an individual's mind, rather than the identity itself (APA, 2013). Gender dysphoria can manifest in both children and adults, although the specific diagnostic criteria differ across age groups. The prime symptom of Gender Dysphoria is the existence of profound urge to be recognised as another gender, accompanied with discomfort regarding one's primary and or secondary sexual characteristics, and a persistent belief that one's emotional and psychological gender is different from their biological sex.

3. Research Questions of the Study

1. What are the primary biological, psychological, and social perspectives developing the advancement of gender dysphoria?
2. In what ways do gender socialization influence the mental health of those experiencing gender dysphoria?
3. In what way the School Curriculum addresses the issue of gender dysphoria?

4. Objectives

1. To explore and synthesize the primary biological, psychological, and social factors that develop the advancement of gender dysphoria.
2. To examine the consequences of gender socialization on the mental health of individuals experiencing gender dysphoria.
3. To analyse how school curriculum plays a vital role in challenging gender dysphoria

5. Research Methodology

A conceptual qualitative research design with a theory-based approach to investigate gender dysphoria through the perspectives of social constructivism and intersectionality was adopted as the method. The research utilises non-human data samples, such as academic literature, policy documents, diagnostic manuals, and educational curricula, instead of gathering original human subject data. The core research methodology involves documentary and theoretical analysis, concentrating on the construction, categorisation, and representation of gender dysphoria across institutional settings. The study integrates theoretical frameworks and current information to rigorously assess the social, psychological, and educational aspects of gender dysphoria. This strategy seeks to enhance theoretical development and elucidate the contextualisation and propagation of gender identity within formal and informal systems.

6. Different Perspectives affecting Gender Dysphoria

- **Biological Perspective:** Multiple biological variables have been identified as potential risk factors for gender dysphoria. One area that has received a lot of attention is prenatal hormone exposure. It is believed that abnormal exposure to androgens or oestrogens at important stages of foetal development could impact gender identity (Bao & Swaab, 2011). Research into the anatomy of the brain has also revealed that people who experience gender dysphoria have unique patterns of brain structure and function. Zhou et al. (1995) found that transgender people exhibit sex-atypical patterns in the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis, a brain area that is involved in sexual behaviour and identity. There may be a neurological basis for gender identity, and although biological data does not provide a complete explanation for gender dysphoria, it does lend credence to this theory.
- **Psychological Perspectives:** Psychological factors highlight the significance of early childhood development, personality traits, and mental health in the development of gender dysphoria. Research indicates a potential association between gender dysphoria and atypical gender-role development or heightened reinforcement during an individual's formative years (Zucker, 2017). It is essential to distinguish between pathology and identity. Individuals with gender dysphoria may experience comorbid mental health issues, including anxiety and depression; however, these issues often stem from social rejection and stigma rather than the gender identity itself (Budge et al., 2013). Supportive psychotherapy facilitates the exploration of gender identity and alleviates distress while preserving the fundamental sense of self.
- **Sociological Perspective:** The sociological factors significantly affect the manifestation and experience of gender dysphoria by an individual. Societal norms, cultural beliefs about gender roles, and the level of acceptance within a person's community influences the way gender variance is perceived, and internalized giving rise to gender expectations (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). In cultures with binary gender expectations i.e; masculine and feminine,

individuals with non-conforming identities may face discrimination, social exclusion, or violence, exacerbating psychological distress. Conversely, research have shown that supportive environments significantly improves mental health outcomes in transgender and gender-diverse individuals (Olson et al., 2016). Furthermore, media representation, legal recognition of gender identity, and access to gender-affirming healthcare also play a role in either mitigating or intensifying the effects of gender dysphoria.

7. Gender Dysphoria as a response to Incongruent Gender Socialisation

Gender socialisation denotes the process by which individuals acquire the gender norms and expectations that are common within their culture. From early life, individuals are socialised through familial connections, educational institutions, media representations, and peer relationships to exhibit behaviours considered suitable for their gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Boys may be encouraged to embody assertiveness, strength, responsibility, and activity, whilst girls may be directed towards embodying compassion, care, nurturing, and passivity. These culturally endorsed narratives not only govern human action but also affect self-concept and social identity. This shaping process fosters a binary conception of gender, marginalising those who diverge from conventional gender categories; masculine and feminine. Research indicates that inflexible gender standards might hinder personal growth and exacerbate psychological discomfort, particularly in persons whose gender identification diverges from the binary (Bem, 1993; Martin & Ruble, 2004).

Socialisation for all commences within the family, where parents and carers frequently unwittingly reinforce gendered narratives and attitudes. Parents typically promote assertiveness in boys and nurturance in girls, so facilitating the internalisation of gendered self-concepts (Bem, 1981). Boys are frequently conditioned to assume the roles of breadwinner, defender, and authority figure, while girls are socialised to become proficient homemakers, carers, and subservient to men. When a youngster articulates a gender identity that diverges from societal norms, they may encounter invalidation or even retribution from their family. To prevent societal ostracism, the family therefore ostracises the child. This contradiction can engender bewilderment, shame, and internalised stigma in gender-diverse children, establishing a basis for gender dysphoria in subsequent stages (Ehrensaft, 2011). Schools and peer groups serve as significant agents of socialisation, reinforcing gender norms through social sanctions, including bullying, exclusion, and mockery aimed at those who do not comply to traditional gender expectations (Pascoe, 2007). Experiences of gender policing have been demonstrated to elevate psychological distress and diminish self-esteem in transgender and gender-nonconforming youth (Russell et al., 2011). The apprehension of social rejection frequently compels individuals to conceal their true gender identities, a coping mechanism that may momentarily alleviate social discord but ultimately exacerbates dysphoria in the long run (McGuire et al., 2010). Furthermore, the media plays a crucial role in shaping and distributing idealised representations of masculinity and femininity. These depictions are frequently rigidly delineated and restrictive, providing minimal room for non-binary or transgender identities. Continual exposure to these values fosters internal discord and self-alienation in persons who do not identify with popular representations (Gill, 2007).

Therefore, the relation between gender socialisation and gender dysphoria is not uniform; it varies based on factors such as culture, race, class, and access to supportive environments. Some cultures and communities offer more fluid understandings of gender, potentially mitigating the harmful effects of rigid socialisation (Nanda, 1999). Supportive family environments, affirming schools, and inclusive policies can serve as protective factors, helping individuals develop a stable sense of identity and reducing the severity of dysphoria (Olson et al., 2016). Though gender socialisation is often overlooked as a ruling aspect of human personality development, its impact on individuals experiencing gender dysphoria is profound. By reinforcing rigid binary norms and penalising deviation, socialisation processes can intensify feelings of alienation and psychological distress. Addressing the root causes of gender-based socialisation and promoting inclusive, affirming environments is essential in reducing the incidence and severity of gender dysphoria.

8. Role of School Curriculum in Preventing the Emergence of Gender Dysphoria

As awareness and diagnosis of gender dysphoria among youth rise (Ristori & Steensma, 2016), schools confront an urgent necessity to establish supportive and conducive environments. A structured school curriculum is essential in addressing and potentially alleviating gender dysphoria by promoting inclusivity, deconstructing gender stereotypes, using gender-neutral language, and normalising diverse gender identities.

An inclusive curriculum validates the identities of transgender and gender-diverse students, thus mitigating feelings of alienation. The incorporation of diverse gender identities in educational materials—across literature, history, health education, and classroom discussions—accurately reflects the lived experiences of all individuals. GLSEN (2021) indicates that LGBTQ+ students in schools with inclusive curricula report feeling safer, experiencing reduced bullying, and achieving improved academic performance. The findings indicate that incorporating gender diversity in the curriculum may serve as a protective factor against mental health challenges commonly linked to gender dysphoria.

The school curriculum effectively challenges traditional gender norms and aids in dismantling the binary perspective of gender, which frequently contributes to gender dysphoria. Conventional educational frameworks often perpetuate strict gender roles, causing distress for students who do not adhere to these norms (Meyer, 2008). Incorporating gender theory and critical pedagogy into curricula facilitates students' examination of societal norms and promotes self-reflection regarding gender and identity (Britzman, 1995). These approaches can mitigate internalised transphobia and enable students to investigate and validate their identities. Health education integrated into the curriculum is essential for delivering factual and nonjudgmental information regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, and mental health. Studies demonstrate that comprehensive and inclusive sex education correlates with increased empathy among students towards peers with diverse gender expressions and a reduced likelihood of bullying or harassment (Travers et al., 2020). Educators specifically trained to deliver this content can establish safe environments for open dialogue, assisting students with gender dysphoria in recognising that they are not alone and that their experiences are both valid and significant.

The implementation of a curriculum that addresses Gender Dysphoria and fosters inclusion for students experiencing this condition presents a significant challenge. Sociopolitical resistance, inadequate teacher training, and fear of repercussions can impede progress (Kumashiro, 2002). In certain areas, legislative initiatives have aimed to limit discussions regarding gender identity within educational settings. These developments highlight the necessity for systemic policy support and professional development to enable teachers to address gender diversity in an effective and sensitive manner.

9. Conclusion

Gender Dysphoria is a burning issue for the individuals of today who are highly aware of the odds, has the thirst to explore and is well equipped with the power of logic and reasoning. They tend to question the gendered norms, and therefore face challenging situations in all spheres of socialization. Whether family, peers, school or media, individuals facing Gender Dysphoria experiences alienation, ridicule, and is considered to be a part of a freak show. Such perceptions from the society influences the mental health leading towards psychological distress, anxiety, fear, and even violence. As the school is considered to be a miniature of the society, the school curriculum has the potential to function as a transformative tool in challenging gender dysphoria. By promoting inclusivity, questioning rigid gender norms, and providing comprehensive health education, schools can foster environments that affirm and support all individuals irrespective of their conformity to societal gendered norms. Such curricular reforms will not just be beneficial for students with gender dysphoria but enrich the educational experience for all by promoting empathy, care, mutual respect, acceptance, critical thinking, and social justice.

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Overview and Objectives of West Bengal Government Schemes for Gender Empowerment and Development

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Abstract

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the multi-dimensional initiatives of the Government of West Bengal aimed at advancing gender and women empowerment. Drawing on schemes across various sectors viz., education, skill development, health, safety, entrepreneurship, and legal protection, the chapter highlights how the state has adopted an integrated and welfare-driven approach towards gender and women empowerment. Flagship programmes such as Kanyashree, Lakshmir Bhandar, Rupashree and Swawlamban, among others, strengthen girls' education, promote financial inclusion, and enhance economic independence. Safety interventions under Mission Shakti, workplace protection measures, and shelter-based support systems address social vulnerabilities and violence. Entrepreneurship and credit-based schemes expand economic opportunities. Together, these initiatives illustrate the state's sustained commitment to fostering gender equity and social justice in West Bengal.

Keywords: Gender empowerment, women's development schemes, financial inclusion, safety, entrepreneurship, social welfare, West Bengal

1. Introduction

The government of West Bengal has demonstrated a strong commitment to gender empowerment and development through a comprehensive array of schemes and initiatives. This report provides an overview of these efforts, highlighting the multi-faceted approach that addresses education, skill development, health, safety, financial independence, entrepreneurship, and social justice for women in the state. The sheer volume and variety of these schemes underscore the state's dedication to fostering gender equality and enhancing the well-being of its female population.

2. Contextual Background on Gender Empowerment in West Bengal

West Bengal, with its rich history of social reform movements, has long recognized the importance of addressing gender disparities and promoting the empowerment of women. The legacy of reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who championed education as a cornerstone of gender equality and actively campaigned against oppressive practices, laid an early foundation for this focus.¹ Inspired by these movements, women in West Bengal have historically mobilized to uplift their peers, establishing a precedent for feminist activism in the region (SPRF India. (2025)). This historical backdrop illustrates a sustained awareness and effort towards achieving gender equality in the state, which likely contributes to the present emphasis on government-sponsored schemes aimed at women's empowerment and development.

The current initiatives by the West Bengal government span a wide spectrum, from conditional cash transfers designed to encourage girls' education to schemes providing financial assistance for marriage and daily needs. Furthermore, the government has implemented measures to enhance women's safety in public and private spaces, support their entrepreneurial aspirations, and address critical social issues such as domestic violence and dowry. This report will delve into the objectives and operational aspects of these various categories of schemes, providing a detailed analysis of the state's ongoing efforts to empower women and foster their development across all spheres of life.

3. Education and Skill Development Schemes for Women

3.1. Kanyashree Prakalpa

Launched in 2013, the Kanyashree Prakalpa stands as a flagship conditional cash transfer scheme implemented across all districts of West Bengal (UNICEF India, 2025). This initiative, designed by the Department of Women Development and Social Welfare, aims to elevate the status and well-being of the girl child within the state (Government of West Bengal, 2025). The core **objectives of the Kanyashree Prakalpa** are to incentivize all teenage girls to pursue schooling for a longer duration, thereby delaying their marriages until they reach the legal age of 18 (Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India, 2025). Beyond preventing child marriage and promoting education, the scheme also seeks to improve the health and nutrition of girls and empower them by fostering their skills and capacities. Moreover, it aims to promote financial inclusion and overall empowerment among adolescent girls, enhancing their social power and self-esteem through targeted behavior change communication strategies (Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India, 2025).

The Kanyashree Prakalpa operates through two primary components. Firstly, it provides an Annual Scholarship of Rs. 1000/- to unmarried girls aged between 13 and 18 years who are enrolled in classes VIII to XII in government-recognized regular schools, equivalent open schools, or equivalent vocational/technical training courses. Secondly, the scheme offers a One-time Grant of Rs. 25,000/- to girls who have turned 18 at the time of application and are enrolled in government-recognized regular or open schools/colleges, pursuing vocational/technical training, engaged in sports activities, or are residents of homes registered under the Juvenile Justice Act of 2000 (Government of West Bengal, 2025). Eligibility for both components generally requires the girls to belong to families with an annual income not exceeding Rs. 1,20,000. However, this income criterion is waived if the girl has lost both parents, has a physical disability of 40% or more, or is an inmate of a J.J. Home (Government of West Bengal, 2025). The scheme targets all girl children aged 13 to 19 years from eligible families who are residents of West Bengal and regularly attending an educational institution (Vikaspedia, 2025). The financial benefits are directly transferred to bank accounts held in the girls' names, promoting financial literacy and autonomy. Girls can apply for the scheme through their respective schools or educational institutions. The Kanyashree Prakalpa stands as a testament to a multi-pronged approach, effectively addressing both educational attainment and critical social issues like child marriage. Its recognition as a best practice in girl-child empowerment by the United Nations underscores its national and international significance. The design of the scheme, with its conditional cash transfers, ensures a direct link between educational engagement and financial support, encouraging girls to remain in school and delay marriage, ultimately leading to improved life outcomes (Economic and Political Weekly, 2025).

3.2. Aikyashree Scholarship Scheme

Launched in the financial year 2019-20, the **Aikyashree Scholarship Scheme** represents the West Bengal government's commitment to supporting the educational aspirations of minority students in the state (IMSAF NGO, 2025). This scheme is fully funded by the state budget and aims to provide financial assistance to students belonging to minority communities within West Bengal. The application process for the Aikyashree Scholarship is conducted online, making it accessible to eligible students across the state.⁸ While the scheme is not exclusively for women, it undoubtedly benefits a significant number of girls from minority communities, thereby contributing to the overall advancement of women's education in West Bengal. By providing financial aid, the Aikyashree Scholarship helps to alleviate economic barriers that might otherwise prevent girls from minority backgrounds from pursuing their academic goals and achieving their full potential.

3.3. West Bengal Student Credit Card

The West Bengal Student Credit Card scheme, introduced by the Higher Education Department, is a significant initiative designed to enable students to pursue education without being hindered by financial constraints. The scheme aims to support students in undertaking secondary, higher secondary, madrasah, undergraduate, and postgraduate studies, including professional degree and other equivalent courses, in educational institutions both within and outside India. Under this scheme, eligible students can access education loans up to 10 lakhs. This provision is

particularly beneficial for women who often face financial limitations in accessing higher education. By providing this financial support, the Student Credit Card scheme empowers women to pursue their academic and professional aspirations, ultimately fostering greater economic independence and social mobility within the state.

3.4. Sabuj Sathi Scheme

The Sabuj Sathi Scheme, another notable initiative by the West Bengal government, focuses on improving access to education by addressing transportation barriers. Under this scheme, the government distributes bicycles to students studying in Classes IX to XII in government-run, government-aided, and government-sponsored schools. The primary objective of this scheme is to increase the enrolment of girls in schools. By providing a reliable means of transportation, the Sabuj Sathi scheme significantly reduces the challenges associated with commuting to school, especially for girls residing in rural areas. This ease of access encourages higher attendance rates and helps to retain girls in the education system, contributing to improved educational outcomes and overall empowerment.

3.4. Swawalamban (Vocational Training)

The Swawalamban scheme, meaning self-reliance, is a vocational training program implemented by the West Bengal Women Development Undertaking. This program, which continues under the 'State Plan', aims to equip both rural and urban women and girls with skills that lead to employment and income generation (Department of Women & Child Development & Social Welfare, 2025). The overarching objective is to foster self-dependence among women through appropriate technical training in a diverse range of traditional and technical occupations, as well as entrepreneurship (Women Entrepreneurship Platform, 2025). The trades covered under Swawalamban are extensive, including areas such as Bamboo & Cane work, Wood Carving, Handloom weaving, Honey Production, Jute Goods Manufacture, Leather goods making, Mushroom Cultivation, Zari Craft and Patch Work, various Handicrafts, Embroidery, Readymade Garment manufacturing, Beautician courses, Community Health Work, Consumer electronics repairing, Batik, Tie & Dye and Block Printing, Food Processing, Handmade paper bags and envelopes, Soft toy making, Rexine bag making, Canteen Management, Office Management, Screen Printing, Shoe making, House Keeping, and Wool Knitting (Department of Women & Child Development & Social Welfare, 2025). These training courses are typically organized by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) with financial assistance from the state government (Department of Women & Child Development & Social Welfare, 2025). Trainees also receive a stipend of Rs. 200/- per head per month (Department of Women & Child Development & Social Welfare, 2025). The Swawalamban scheme plays a crucial role in directly addressing the need for skill development among women, providing them with tangible vocational skills that can pave the way for employment or self-employment. This, in turn, fosters economic independence and contributes significantly to their overall empowerment. The wide array of trades offered ensures that women can choose training that aligns with their interests and local market demands.

3.5. Skill Development Courses by WBMDFC

The West Bengal Minorities' Development & Finance Corporation (WBMDFC 2025) also sponsors various skill development courses, including those conducted through the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Kolkata, for the year 2024-25. While these courses are primarily targeted towards minority communities, they undoubtedly provide valuable skill enhancement opportunities for women within these communities. The objective of these initiatives is to improve the employability and economic prospects of minority youth, including women, by offering specialized training in various fields. This focused approach helps address the specific needs and challenges faced by these communities in accessing quality skill development programs. Health and Safety Schemes for Women.

3.6. One Stop Centres (OSC) under Mission Shakti

As part of the National Mission Shakti framework, the **One Stop Centre (OSC) scheme** has been implemented across India since April 1, 2015, including in various districts of West Bengal

(Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. (2025). These centres aim to provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence and those in distress, whether in private or public spaces (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. (2025). The services offered at OSCs include medical aid, legal aid and advice, temporary shelter, police assistance, and psycho-social counselling to women in need. Women can directly approach these centres to access the comprehensive support available. The following table lists the operational One Stop Centres in West Bengal as of January 31, 2025 (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. (2025).

3.7. Women Helpline (WHL) under Mission Shakti

Another crucial component of the Sambal sub-scheme under Mission Shakti is the Women Helpline (WHL) with the toll-free number 181 and 1091 in West Bengal (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. (2025). This helpline aims to provide 24x7 emergency and non-emergency response to women in both public and private spaces by linking them with relevant authorities such as the Police, One Stop Centres, Hospitals, and Legal Services Authorities. Additionally, the helpline offers information about various women welfare schemes and programs. While national data indicates a significant number of calls received and women assisted through this helpline, specific data for West Bengal is not readily available in the provided materials (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. (2025).

3.8. Shakti Sadan and Sakhi Niwas under Mission Shakti

The Samarthya sub-scheme of Mission Shakti also includes initiatives like Shakti Sadan and Sakhi Niwas, which provide safe and supportive environments for women in different circumstances. Shakti Sadan are integrated relief and rehabilitation homes for women in distress, including trafficked women, offering a secure environment to help them overcome difficult situations. In West Bengal, there is one functional Shakti Sadan located in Alipurduar, which has assisted 1,314 women. Sakhi Niwas, on the other hand, provides safe and affordable accommodation for women who are in the workforce or aspiring to join it, potentially also including day-care centres for their children. West Bengal has two functional Sakhi Niwas, one in Dakshin Dinajpur and another in Maldah, which have collectively assisted 1,024 women. These facilities play a vital role in providing immediate shelter and long-term support to vulnerable women in the state (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. (2025).

3.9. Safety Measures at Workplaces

Recognizing the importance of ensuring women's safety in the workplace, the West Bengal government has introduced specific measures, particularly for women working night shifts in state-run hospitals (Economic Times 2025). These measures include the creation of CCTV-monitored safe zones within the premises and the development of an emergency mobile application that women can use to communicate with local police stations in case of any emergency. Additionally, the government encourages women employees, both in state and private establishments, to form two-member teams during night shifts to enhance mutual support and safety. There is also a recommendation to maintain an appropriate gender ratio among security staff at workplaces. Furthermore, the government has emphasized the need for designated resting rooms for women working late hours and has expanded the 'Rattirer Sathi - Helpers of the Night' program to cover hostels and other establishments where women work night shifts, deploying volunteers to provide safety support (Economic Times 2025). Other measures include the implementation of security checks and breathalyzer tests at medical colleges, super specialty hospitals, and district hospitals. The government has also requested all organizations to establish Vishaka Committees on sexual harassment at the workplace if they are not already in place and has announced increased night police patrols at medical colleges, hospitals, women's hostels, and similar locations. General guidelines for employers include ensuring proper lighting, providing sufficient security guards during night shifts, offering transportation facilities with GPS tracking for women employees working night shifts, and ensuring adequate rest hours between shifts. These comprehensive measures demonstrate the government's commitment to creating a safer working environment for women across various sectors in West Bengal (SSRANA 2025).

3.10. Swawlamban

Swawlamban: Grant-In-Aid Scheme for Skill Development Training of Rural & Urban Women & Girls and Transgender of The Distressed & Under Privileged Section of the Society The scheme has been observing the following broad objectives –

- Developing skill leading to generating of income of the women & girls in crisis situation and from the under privileged section of the society ensuring economic participation of women and transgender in the family.
- Providing ‘Entrepreneurship development training’ for making them capable for taking up bankable projects after the training.
- Influencing small & cottage entrepreneurship with a motive to create viable markets in the domestic as well as overseas.
- Converging different facilities available with the Local Government for all round development of the women & girls.
- Creating scope for alternative source of employment to women & girls in tribal areas, closed tea gardens, hills, islands and slums without any overlapping of similar programme.

3.11. Muktir Alo

The Honourable Supreme Court of India directed to explore alternative opportunities for better livelihood for sex workers and victims of sex trafficking. The proposal of promulgation of Muktir Alo – a comprehensive Scheme for rehabilitation of sex workers and victims of sex trafficking in West Bengal under the Department of Women & Child Development and Social Welfare, Government of West Bengal has been approved in Cabinet Meeting on 13th June, 2014. Subsequently this Notification on implementation of Muktir Alo Scheme in collaboration with experienced and reputed NGO was issued by the Department. Muktir Alo scheme was inaugurated on 4th September, 2015 by the Honourable Chief Minister, West Bengal. West Bengal Women Development Undertaking has been declared as Nodal Agency on behalf of Women Development and Social Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal. This scheme intends to provide opportunities of life with dignity and alternative career opportunities to the sex workers and trafficked victims (female).

3.12. Swawlamban Bharosa (Geriatric Care)

While the primary focus of the Swawlamban scheme is vocational training for women, it also includes a component known as Swawlamban Bharosa, which focuses on geriatric care. This aspect of the scheme suggests a broader commitment to social welfare, extending beyond just skill development to address the needs of elderly individuals. Further details about the specific objectives and operations of the Swawlamban Bharosa (Geriatric Care) component would provide a more complete understanding of its role in the overall framework of government schemes (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2025).

4. Financial Assistance and Entrepreneurship Support Schemes for Women

4.1. Lakshmir Bhandar Scheme

Launched in February 2021, the Lakshmir Bhandar Scheme is a flagship program of the West Bengal government aimed at providing financial assistance to women from economically weaker sections of society. The scheme provides monthly financial assistance to female members of all families in the state within the age group of 25 to 60 years who are enrolled under the ‘Swasthya Sathi’ scheme (Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India, 2025). The amount of assistance varies based on the category of the household: women from Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) households receive 1,200/- per month, while women from other categories receive 1,000/- per month. The primary objective of the Lakshmir Bhandar Scheme is to empower women and make them financially independent by providing them with a regular income to meet their daily needs and improve their overall financial condition (Jaagrak Bharat, 2025). To be eligible, the applicant must be a resident of West Bengal, aged between 25

and 60 years, and her household must be enrolled under the “Swasthyasathi” scheme. Women who are government employees in permanent employment or retired government employees receiving a regular salary or pension are not eligible for this scheme. The application process is conducted through camps organized under the “Duare Sarkar” (Government at your Doorstep) initiative, where applicants can submit filled-in forms along with necessary documents such as the Swasthyasathi card, Aadhaar card, SC/ST certificate (if applicable), and bank account details (Jaagruk Bharat, 2025). The financial assistance is directly credited monthly to the Aadhaar-linked bank account held solely by the eligible female member of the household through Direct Bank Transfer (DBT) (Jaagruk Bharat, 2025).

4.2. Rupashree Prakalpa

The Rupashree Prakalpa, launched in 2018, is a social welfare scheme by the Government of West Bengal that aims to provide one-time financial assistance to economically disadvantaged families for the marriage of their daughters (Jaagruk Bharat, 2025). The scheme provides a one-time grant of Rs. 25,000/- to families at the time of their adult daughters’ marriages to help mitigate the difficulties they face in bearing the expenditure, for which they often resort to borrowing money at high interest rates. The scheme is applicable for all marriages effected from April 1, 2018, and is implemented in all districts of West Bengal (Vikaspedia, 2025). To be eligible, the applicant (the prospective bride) must have attained the age of 18 years, be unmarried on the date of application, and the proposed marriage must be her first marriage. She must have been born in West Bengal or have been a resident for the last 5 years, or her parents must be permanent residents of the state. The annual family income should not be greater than Rs. 1.50 lakhs. The prospective groom must have attained the age of 21 years. The applicant must have an active bank account in her name that supports e-payments through NEFT. The application form can be downloaded from the website of the Department of Women & Child Development and Social Welfare or obtained free of cost from the Block Development Officer’s office (for rural areas), the Sub-Divisional Officer’s office (for municipal areas), or the Municipal Commissioner’s office (for municipal corporation areas). Required documents include proof of age, a self-declaration of never-married status, family income proof, proof of residence, bank account details, proof of the proposed marriage (e.g., invitation card), and proof of the prospective groom’s age, along with coloured passport-size photographs of both (Vikaspedia, 2025). The completed application form, along with all necessary documents, must be submitted to the relevant local government office. The financial assistance is provided prior to the marriage (Jaagruk Bharat, 2025).

4.3. Widow Pension Scheme

Launched in 2010 by the Women and Child Development and Social Welfare Department, the Widow Pension Scheme aims to provide social security to widows facing economic hardship in West Bengal.⁶ Under this scheme, eligible widows receive a monthly financial support of Rs. 300 - 1000/- to help them with their daily expenses and restore their dignity. To be eligible for the pension, the applicant must be a resident of West Bengal for more than 10 years and have a monthly income not exceeding Rs. 1000 (Khargram BDO, 2025). Additionally, the applicant should not have any relatives who can maintain her. The application process is offline, and applicants need to visit the Office of the Block Development Officer or the Executive Officer of the concerned Panchayat Samity if residing in rural areas, the Office of the Sub-Divisional Officer if residing in municipal/notified areas outside Kolkata Municipal Corporation, or the Office of the Controller of Vagrancy, West Bengal in Kolkata. An application form is provided free of cost at these offices and needs to be submitted along with required documents such as a state domicile certificate, residential certificate, Voter ID card, Ration Card, Aadhaar Card, income certificate, bank account details, the husband’s death certificate, and a passport-size photograph. The pension is provided through direct benefit transfer into the beneficiary’s bank account, and there is no requirement for annual renewal (Khargram BDO, 2025).

4.4. Manabik Pension Scheme

The “Manabik” Scheme was launched in 2018 by the Department of Women & Child Development and Social Welfare, Government of West Bengal, to provide financial support to individuals who

are unable to work due to a disability (CMO. Chief Minister's Office, Government of West Bengal, 2025). Under this scheme, eligible persons with disabilities receive a monthly pension of 1,000/- Initially, the scheme was applicable for persons with 50% or more disability and an annual family income not exceeding Rs. 1,00,000. However, the guidelines were later modified to extend the benefit to persons with 40% and above disability. This scheme, part of the "Jai Bangla Scheme, 2020" umbrella, aims to provide social security to a vulnerable (WBXPress, 2025) section of society.

4.5. West Bengal Bhyabisyat Credit Card

The West Bengal Bhyabisyat Credit Card scheme is an initiative aimed at supporting young entrepreneurs in the state. Introduced as a successor to the "Karmasathi Prakalpa," this scheme offers subsidy-linked and collateral-free loans for setting up new ventures, projects, or micro-enterprises in the manufacturing, service, business/trading, and agro-based activities sectors.⁷ The scheme targets young individuals in the age group of 18 to 45 years (WBXPress, 2025). The "Shilper Samadhane" initiative of the Government of West Bengal actively sponsors applications under the Bhabishyat Credit Card scheme to banks. This scheme aims to encourage entrepreneurship among the youth and facilitate the creation of new businesses, thereby contributing to economic growth and employment generation in the state (Government of West Bengal, 2025).

4.6. Swami Vivekananda Swanirbhar Karmasansthan Prakalpa (SVSKP)

The Swami Vivekananda Swanirbhar Karmasansthan Prakalpa (SVSKP) is a flagship scheme of the Department of Self-Help Group (SHG) & Self Employment (SE), implemented by the West Bengal Swarojgar Corporation Ltd. (WBSCL) across the state. The primary objective of this scheme is to enhance access to credit for the development of rural and urban enterprises by supporting unemployed young individuals and groups of individuals. The target group includes unemployed young persons within the age range of 18 to 45 years and with a family income ceiling of Rs. 15,000/- per month. The scheme places significant emphasis on training, particularly in trades that utilize locally available raw materials and traditional crafts with sufficient market potential. Launched in the financial year 2011-12, the SVSKP had provided support to a substantial number of individuals by September 2019.²⁹ This scheme plays a crucial role in promoting self-employment and entrepreneurship among the youth, including women, in West Bengal (Government of West Bengal, 2025).

4.7. West Bengal Swanirbhar Sahayak Prakalpa (WBSSP)

The West Bengal Swanirbhar Sahayak Prakalpa (WBSSP) was launched in the financial year 2012- 13 with the aim of reducing the interest burden on Self-Help Groups (SHGs) accessing bank credit through interest subvention. The scheme ensures that no SHG pays more than 2 percent as interest on the bank loans they receive, with the interest subsidy from the department ranging from 9 percent to 2 percent, depending on the nature of the group and the program under which it was mobilized. Implemented throughout the state for all registered SHGs accessing bank credit, the Department has been able to provide interest subvention to a large number of self-help groups. This program, entirely funded by the state government and implemented through the West Bengal Swarojgar Corporation Limited, plays a significant role in supporting women's economic empowerment, as many SHGs in West Bengal comprise primarily women members (Government of West Bengal, 2025).

4.8. Start-up Bengal

Start-up Bengal is an initiative by the West Bengal government aimed at fostering the growth of small business enterprises and improving the start-up ecosystem in the state. This initiative seeks to promote the development of entrepreneurs both nationally and globally by providing a platform that connects entrepreneurs and investors. The portal evaluates proposals submitted by entrepreneurs based on financial parameters, provides a digital gateway for application and transparent identification of eligible proposals, and connects entrepreneurs with professional experts and bankers. The government offers various incentives for setting up businesses, and

the portal provides comprehensive information about these incentives in an accessible manner. While not exclusively for women, this initiative provides a supportive environment for aspiring women entrepreneurs in West Bengal to establish and grow their businesses (SheAtWork 2025).

4.9. West Bengal Women Development Undertaking

The West Bengal Women Development Undertaking plays a crucial role in planning, promoting, undertaking, and evaluating programs aimed at enhancing entrepreneurship and ensuring self-employment among women in the fields of trade, business, and services. The objective of the Undertaking is to encourage women to earn and improve their standard of living. It also aims to assist women in setting up cooperatives, associations, or other bodies to improve their vocational pursuits. The Undertaking implements major projects such as Swabalamban (NORAD) and Swayamsiddha, which are focused on vocational training and empowering underprivileged women through Self Help Groups (SHGs). These initiatives directly contribute to women's economic empowerment and self-reliance in the state (SheAtWork 2025).

4.10. Loan Scheme for Entrepreneurs (with focus on women)

The West Bengal government has implemented a comprehensive loan scheme aimed at empowering aspiring entrepreneurs and providing them with the necessary financial support to turn their business ideas into reality. The objectives of this scheme include encouraging entrepreneurship across various sectors and promoting balanced regional growth by supporting businesses in both rural and urban areas (Marg ERP, 2025). A key aspect of this scheme is the provision of special loans and financial support specifically for women entrepreneurs, in a bid to promote gender equality and empower women in the business sector. These "Women Entrepreneur Loans" aim to provide the necessary capital and support for women to start, expand, and manage their own businesses, thereby fostering their economic independence and contribution to the state's economy (Marg ERP, 2025).

5. Government Initiatives Addressing Social Issues Affecting Women

5.1. Legal Framework: Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, Dowry Prohibition Act

The Government of India has enacted several key pieces of legislation to protect women from violence and address social issues such as domestic violence and dowry, and these laws are applicable in West Bengal. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, provides a legal framework for women who have been in a domestic relationship with an abuser, where both parties have lived together in a shared household and are related by consanguinity, marriage, or a relationship in the nature of marriage or adoption. This Act mandates states to appoint Protection Officers in each district to report cases of domestic violence to the Magistrate and assist in the discharge of his functions. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, prohibits the giving or taking of dowry, which is defined as any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly in consideration for the marriage (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2023). Amendments to the Indian Penal Code in 1983 and 1986 introduced Section 304B (dowry deaths) and Section 498A (cruelty by husband and in-laws) to address these specific crimes. Section 304B defines dowry death as the death of a woman within seven years of marriage due to burns or bodily injury under unnatural circumstances, with evidence of cruelty or harassment by the husband or his relatives in connection with dowry (LawDocs, 2025). Section 498A punishes the husband or relatives of a woman who subject her to cruelty or harassment. These legal provisions provide a crucial foundation for the government's efforts to combat dowry and domestic violence in West Bengal.

5.2. District Committee for Protection of Women's Rights and Dowry Prohibition

At the district level, there are specific committees dedicated to the protection of women's rights and the prohibition of dowry. These District Committees likely play a crucial role in implementing state and national laws and policies at the grassroots level. Their responsibilities may include raising awareness about women's rights and the illegality of dowry, providing support to victims of violence and dowry harassment, and monitoring the enforcement of relevant legislation within their respective districts (Stand Up Against Violence, 2025).

5.3. “Duare Sarkar” Initiative

The “Duare Sarkar” (Government at your Doorstep) initiative launched by the Chief Minister of West Bengal is an innovative ICT-driven administrative mass outreach program aimed at delivering pro-poor, citizen-centric services through community-level outreach camps. These camps are attended by government functionaries with IT setup to enroll eligible citizens, with a focus on vulnerable groups including senior citizens, persons with disabilities, women, and the poorest. Several schemes relevant to women’s empowerment, such as Kanyashree, Rupashree, Manabik (pension for persons with disabilities), and support for widows, are included in the services provided through these camps. This initiative enhances the accessibility of these schemes for women across the state, ensuring that those who face challenges in accessing government services can benefit from them (Government of West Bengal, 2025).

5.4. Community-Level Responses and Support Organizations

Beyond government initiatives, there exists a network of women’s support organizations and government agencies in West Bengal that address issues such as family violence, dowry prohibition, and provide essential services like counseling, legal support, vocational training, and healthcare (Stand Up Against Violence, 2025). These organizations, including the West Bengal Social Welfare Advisory Board, the Directorate of Social Welfare, the West Bengal Commission for Women, and various NGOs, play a vital role in providing direct assistance to women facing difficulties. Additionally, community-level initiatives, such as women’s collectives and informal networks, also contribute significantly to addressing domestic violence and supporting women in need (International Center for Research on Women, 2016). These grassroots efforts often work in conjunction with government programs to provide a comprehensive support system for women in the state.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of various government schemes in West Bengal reveals a strong and multi-faceted commitment to gender empowerment and development. Through initiatives focused on education, skill development, health, safety, financial assistance, entrepreneurship, and addressing social issues, the state government is actively working to improve the lives and status of women across the state. Flagship schemes like Kanyashree Prakalpa and Lakshmir Bhandar demonstrate a direct investment in the well-being and financial independence of girls and women. Furthermore, the establishment of support systems like One Stop Centres, Shakti Sadan, and Sakhi Niwas provides crucial safety nets for women facing violence and distress. The focus on workplace safety and the legal frameworks in place to combat domestic violence and dowry highlight the government’s efforts to create a more secure and equitable society for women. The inclusion of women in entrepreneurship support schemes and the dedicated efforts of the West Bengal Women Development Undertaking underscore the importance placed on women’s economic empowerment. Overall, the comprehensive nature of these schemes and initiatives reflects a sustained commitment to fostering gender equality and ensuring the holistic development of women in West Bengal.

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Recent Trends in Female Youth Employment in India

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Abstract

Female youth employment is a critical and important dimension of India's labour market. Using ILO data for 2018–2024, this study examines trends in labour force participation, employment ratios, education, skills, and sectoral and occupational distribution among females aged 15–24. The findings indicate a gradual rise in employment and labour force participation, particularly in rural areas. However, employment is largely concentrated in medium-skilled, informal activities, with less representation in high-skilled occupations.

Keywords: Female youth employment, Female youth labour force participation, Female youth working-age population, Informal employment

1. Introduction

Youth population is an asset of the society; they are the pillars of the future. Youth population of a country contributes to the human capital generation not only in today but also in future. The growth and development of a country depend on the active engagement of its youth population in various socio-economic activities like generating demand for goods and services, active participation in the labour market, or enriching culture to a large extent. India is among the few countries who has the advantage of having a higher youth population and enjoys a demographic dividend generated from the growing share of the working age population (15-59) (Mamgain and Tiwari, 2015). The growing share of youth population, especially female youth population, can play an important role in shaping the future path of a country. They can educate the future generation and thus contribute to upgrade future human capital and nation building. They can become a wage earner of the family and can help the family in the time of distress in addition with the male members of the family. Female employment contributes to empower females by making them economically independent. However, female participation in labour force is consistently low in India since independence. Female youth participation in the labour force follows the same trend in India - a very low percentage of youth female working age population is employed in India in spite of the fact that they are well educated. There is a very rate of unemployment among educated youth, particularly women (Dev and Venkatanarayana, 2011). Scholars found that the bulge of female youth are in agriculture and other sectors where skill is not essential at the entry point (Chatterjee, 2024). However, there are less studies on female youth labour market participation for the age group 15-24 in the Indian context. The paper aims to discuss some recent trends in female youth participation belonging to 15-24 age group in labour force in India. The data is taken from International Labour Organisation dataset from 2018 to 2024. The next section, recent trends, discusses some trends in female youth employment that has been observed empirically in recent times from data.

2. Recent Trends

Working age population is an important component of the labour market of any country. International Labour Organisation, in general, considers 15-59 age group population as working age population. The Table-1 shows that female youth working age population for the age group 15-24 at national level increased during 2018-2024 except the COVID-19 year 2020. The Table-1 further shows that female youth working age population is much higher in rural areas compared to the urban areas in India. In particular, female youth working age population in urban areas is one-third of female youth working age population in rural areas during all the years from 2018 to 2024. Moreover, female working age population of the age group 15-24 becomes more or less stagnant in urban areas during 2018-2024.

Table-1: Youth female working age population (15-24 age group) by area in India from 2018-2024 (in Thousands)

| Year | National | Rural | Urban |
|------|----------|-------|-------|
| 2024 | 102128 | 73404 | 28724 |
| 2023 | 100040 | 72136 | 27903 |
| 2022 | 101569 | 74670 | 26899 |
| 2021 | 101154 | 74034 | 27119 |
| 2020 | 95987 | 68347 | 27640 |
| 2019 | 100917 | 70370 | 30547 |
| 2018 | 95818 | 67286 | 28532 |

Source: ILO dataset

The Table-2 shows that female youth working age population with basic level of education, intermediate level of education, and advanced level of education increases during 2018-2024. Moreover, female youth working age population with less than basic level of education has been decreased continuously from 9341 thousands in 2018 to 4789 thousands in 2024. This implies that overall education level of female youth working age population has been increased during 2018-2024. However, female youth working age population with basic level of education is maximum among all educational categories followed by intermediate level of education in India during 2018-2024. Female youth working age population with advanced level of education is even lower than those who have completed their intermediate level of education during all the years from 2018 to 2024 in India.

Table-2: Youth female working age population by educational status in India during 2018-2024 (in thousand) (Source: ILO dataset)

| Year | Less than Basic | Basic | Intermediate | Advanced | Level not stated |
|------|-----------------|-------|--------------|----------|------------------|
| 2024 | 4789 | 57909 | 26925 | 12506 | |
| 2023 | 5377 | 56650 | 26490 | 11522 | |
| 2022 | 6037 | 59010 | 25213 | 11310 | |
| 2021 | 7461 | 57165 | 24754 | 11482 | 68647 |
| 2020 | 7223 | 53894 | 24105 | 10414 | 64308 |
| 2019 | 9328 | 56282 | 23772 | 11474 | 67756 |
| 2018 | 9341 | 55199 | 21797 | 9480 | |

The Table-3 shows that the employment to population ratio of youth female workers defined by (total youth female employment/ female youth (15-24 age group) working age population) *100 has been increased steadily at national level during 2018-2024. It has increased from 7 percent in 2018 to 14 percent in 2024; has become doubled. This implies that total employment level of female youth with respect to 15-24 working age population shows a rising trend in recent times at national level. The same trend has been observed in both the rural areas and urban areas. However, employment to population ratio for youth female workers in rural areas is higher than employment to population ratio for youth female workers in urban areas during 2021-2024. However, the opposite was observed only for two years, 2018 and 2019. The Table-3 further shows that overall employment to population ratio for the working age group 15-24 is consistently low at national level. The average employment to population ratio of youth female workers was 10 percent during 2018-2024 at national level. However, the average employment to population ratio of youth female workers in rural area was slightly higher than the national average (11 percent on the average) during 2018-2024.

Table-3: Employment to Population Ratio of Youth female workers by area during 2018-2024 (in Percentage)

| Year | National | Rural | Urban |
|------|----------|-------|-------|
| 2024 | 14 | 15 | 12 |
| 2023 | 15 | 16 | 11 |
| 2022 | 11 | 11 | 10 |
| 2021 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| 2020 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| 2019 | 9 | 9 | 10 |
| 2018 | 7 | 7 | 8 |

Source: ILO dataset

Employment to population ratio by educational status, defined by (Employed female youth with ith educational level/ female youth (15-24 age group) working age population with ith educational level)*100) shows some interesting trend for youth female workers. Employment of female youth workers with respect to respective working age population has been increased for all educational categories during 2018-2024. Employment of female youth workers with no formal education or no schooling has been increased with respect to female youth working age population with no schooling during 2018-2024. The same trend has been observed for female youth employment having pre-primary education or primary education or post-secondary education or higher degrees. However, employment to population ratio for youth female workers with lower secondary education or upper secondary education are relatively much lower during all the years 2018-2024. The Table further shows that almost 30 percent of female working age population of the age group 15-24, who have completed their advanced level of education, have been employed in the last two years. However, the employment to population ratio for those female youth workers with post-secondary education, is highest among all educational categories; 26 percent of them are employed on the average during 2018-2024.

¹ Ith educational categories are no schooling, pre-primary, primary education,....., second stage of tertiary education.

Table-4: Employment to Population Ratio of Youth female workers by Education during 2018-2024 (in Percentage)

| Year | No Schooling | Pre-primary education | Primary education or first stage of basic education | Lower secondary or second stage of basic education | Upper secondary education | Post-secondary non-tertiary education | First stage of tertiary education (not leading directly to an advanced research qualification) | Second stage of tertiary education (leading to an advanced research qualification) |
|------|--------------|-----------------------|---|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| 2024 | 27 | 23 | 21 | 12 | 11 | 27 | 20 | 29 |
| 2023 | 25 | 33 | 25 | 12 | 10 | 38 | 21 | 29 |
| 2022 | 19 | 27 | 13 | 8 | 7 | 29 | 19 | 21 |
| 2021 | 17 | 21 | 15 | 8 | 6 | 32 | 16 | 23 |
| 2020 | 16 | 18 | 13 | 7 | 6 | 20 | 14 | 24 |
| 2019 | 15 | 19 | 13 | 7 | 5 | 24 | 14 | 22 |
| 2018 | 12 | 20 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 14 | 13 | 17 |

Source: ILO dataset

Female youth workers, who are currently employed or actively seeking for a job constitute female youth labour force. Table-5 shows that labour force participation of female youth increases irrespective of their marital status during 2018-2024.

Table 5: Female Youth Labour force by marital status during 2018-2024 (In Thousand)

| Year | Married | Single | Divorced or legally separated | Widowed |
|------|---------|--------|-------------------------------|---------|
| 2024 | 5833 | 11342 | 62 | 23 |
| 2023 | 6152 | 11197 | 88 | 26 |
| 2022 | 4131 | 9060 | 36 | 28 |
| 2021 | 3894 | 8322 | 90 | 20 |
| 2020 | 3608 | 8126 | 36 | 27 |
| 2019 | 4170 | 7869 | 81 | 41 |
| 2018 | 3112 | 6401 | 18 | 20 |

Source: ILO dataset

Hence, the supply of labour by female youth aged 15-24 has been increased during 2018-2024. However, single girls dominate the female youth labour force followed by married youth females. Moreover, the number of female unmarried youth, who are either working or searching for a job, has almost doubled between 2018 and 2024. The Table-5 further shows that labour force participation of single female youth has been more than doubled than that of married youth female in almost all the years during 2018-2024. Labour force participation of young divorced or widowed are low. In particular, labour force participation of young widowed are lowest during 2019-2024.

Table-6 shows that the labour force participation of female youth, who have completed their lower secondary or second stage of basic education, has been maximum followed by those, who have completed their first stage of tertiary education and by those, who have completed their upper secondary education. Moreover, the youth female labour force is dominated by those females, who have completed their lower secondary education. The Table-6 further shows that labour force participation of youth female workers, who never attended school, has been consistently higher than that of those who have completed their second stage of tertiary education or post-secondary non-tertiary education for all the years during 2018-2024. The labour force participation of highly educated young female has been consistently low compared to labour force participation young female with low level of education, who just completed their primary education or have no formal education at all during all the years 2018-2024. The female youth labour force is mainly dominated by low educated females than highly educated females.

Table 6: Female Youth Labour force by Education during 2018 to 2024 in India (in Thousands)

| Year | No schooling | Pre-primary education | Primary education or first stage of basic education | Lower secondary or second stage of basic education | Upper secondary education | Post-secondary non-tertiary education | First stage of tertiary education (not leading directly to an advanced research qualification) | Second stage of tertiary education (leading to an advanced research qualification) |
|------|--------------|-----------------------|---|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| 2024 | 953 | 312 | 1371 | 6358 | 3142 | 355 | 4014 | 757 |
| 2023 | 1041 | 424 | 1823 | 6461 | 2930 | 325 | 3780 | 678 |
| 2022 | 862 | 398 | 1077 | 4425 | 2081 | 411 | 3321 | 680 |
| 2021 | 1017 | 394 | 1106 | 4168 | 1759 | 389 | 2942 | 550 |
| 2020 | 862 | 413 | 1089 | 3861 | 1783 | 293 | 2822 | 675 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|------|------|-----|------|------|------|-----|------|-----|
| 2019 | 1111 | 452 | 1226 | 3929 | 1641 | 334 | 2721 | 751 |
| 2018 | 865 | 439 | 791 | 3094 | 1372 | 284 | 2197 | 510 |

Source: ILO dataset

The Table-7 shows that female youth labour force participation rate in urban areas is consistently low than that in rural areas in all the years during 2018-2024. In particular, female youth labour force participation rate in rural areas has been more than doubled than female youth labour force participation rate in urban areas on the average during 2018-2024. This has been drastically reduced in very recent times; becomes one-third of female youth labour force participation in rural areas during 2023-2024. The gap in female labour force participation by area was lower during 2018-2020 and then became widened in very recent years, during 2021-2024.

**Table-7: Female Youth Labour Force Participation Rate by Area during 2018-2024
(in thousands and in percentage)**

| Year | In Thousand | | | In Percentage | |
|------|-------------|-------|-------|---------------|-------|
| | National | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban |
| 2024 | 17261 | 12654 | 4606 | 73 | 36 |
| 2023 | 17462 | 13128 | 4334 | 75 | 33 |
| 2022 | 13256 | 9359 | 3896 | 71 | 42 |
| 2021 | 12325 | 8720 | 3605 | 71 | 41 |
| 2020 | 11797 | 7675 | 4122 | 65 | 54 |
| 2019 | 12165 | 7878 | 4287 | 65 | 54 |
| 2018 | 9551 | 6101 | 3450 | 64 | 57 |

Source: ILO dataset

However, Table-7 shows an upward trend in female labour force participation rate at national level. Female youth labour force participation rate at national level has been increased from 9551 thousand in 2018 to 17261 thousand in 2024. This implies that youth female working age population is now more actively engaging in workforce either by searching for a job or by working in recent years. Rural areas as well as urban areas have followed the same trend- female youth labour force participation in rural areas has been increased from 6101 thousand in 2018 to 12654 thousand in 2024 whereas female youth labour force participation in rural areas has been increased from 3450 thousand in 2018 to 4606 thousand in 2024.

Economically active population, which refers to the share of working-age population that is actively employed, shows an important aspect of a labour market. Table-7 shows that the rate of economically active female youth population, who are actively employed, at national level has been low during 2018-2024. However, the rate of economically active female youth population has been increased in recent years at national level from 10 percent in 2018 to 17 percent in 2024. Rural areas as well as urban areas are following the same trend- the rate of economically active female youth population has been increased from 9 percent in 2018 to 17 percent and from 12 percent in 2018 to 16 percent in 2024 in rural areas and urban areas, respectively. However, economically active female youth population in urban areas was higher than that of in rural areas during 2018-2022. The trend has been reversed in very recent times. The rate of economically active female youth population in rural areas has been higher than that of urban areas in very recent years, during 2023-2024.

Table-8: Economically Active Youth Female Population by Area during 2018-2024 (in %)

| Year | National | Rural | Urban |
|------|----------|-------|-------|
| 2024 | 17 | 17 | 16 |
| 2023 | 17 | 18 | 16 |
| 2022 | 13 | 13 | 14 |
| 2021 | 12 | 12 | 13 |
| 2020 | 12 | 11 | 15 |
| 2019 | 12 | 11 | 14 |
| 2018 | 10 | 9 | 12 |

Source: ILO dataset

Table-9 shows that female youth workers, who completed upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education and work as medium- scale workers, have dominated the female youth labour market in India in recent times, from 2018. 65 per cent of female youth workers are medium skilled workers on the average during 2018-2024. Table 9 further shows that low skilled female youth workers, who never went to school or studied till lower secondary or second stage of basic education, are more in numbers than skilled female youth workers, who completed first stage of tertiary education and second state of tertiary education in India during 2018-2024. The Table further shows that though the number of high skilled workers increased during 2018-2024 with year-wise fluctuations, there is a continuously reduction in the employment of high skilled workers in percentage term. The same trend is observed for low skilled workers; female youth employment of low skilled workers reduced continuously in percentage term during 2018-2024.

Table-9: Female Youth Employment by Skill Level (in Thousand and in Percentage)

| Female Youth Employment by Skill Level (in Thousand) | | | | Female Youth Employment by Skill Level (in Percentage) | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| Year | Low Skilled workers (Skill level 1) | Medium Skilled workers (Skill level 2) | High Skilled workers (Skill level 3 and 4) | Low Skilled workers (Skill level 1) | Medium Skilled workers (Skill level 2) | High Skilled workers (Skill level 3 and 4) |
| 2024 | 2041 | 10390 | 1856 | 14 | 73 | 13 |
| 2023 | 2155 | 10590 | 1995 | 15 | 72 | 14 |
| 2022 | 1775 | 7048 | 1879 | 17 | 66 | 18 |
| 2021 | 1813 | 6170 | 1867 | 18 | 63 | 19 |
| 2020 | 1632 | 5448 | 1655 | 19 | 62 | 19 |
| 2019 | 1952 | 5366 | 1981 | 21 | 57 | 21 |
| 2018 | 1406 | 4159 | 1450 | 20 | 59 | 21 |

Source: ILO dataset

Table-10 shows that female youth are mostly employed in the non-agricultural sector followed by agriculture during 2018-2022 except the year 2023. Female youth employment in industry has been consistently low compared to agriculture, non- agriculture and service during 2018-2024. However, youth female employment in industry has been increased continuously from 2021-2024. The same trend is observed for youth female employment in service sector during 2020-2024.

Table-10: Female Youth Employment by Broad Economic Sectors during 2018-2024 (in Thousand)

| Year | Agriculture | Industry | Non-Agriculture | Services | Total |
|------|-------------|----------|-----------------|----------|-------|
| 2024 | 6936 | 3576 | 7350 | 3774 | 14286 |
| 2023 | 7522 | 3414 | 7219 | 3805 | 14741 |
| 2022 | 4935 | 2544 | 5768 | 3224 | 10702 |
| 2021 | 4916 | 2063 | 4934 | 2871 | 9850 |
| 2020 | 3979 | 2215 | 4806 | 2591 | 8784 |
| 2019 | 3662 | 2783 | 5692 | 2909 | 9354 |
| 2018 | 2853 | 1965 | 4200 | 2235 | 7053 |

Source: ILO dataset

Table-11 shows that most of the youth females are employed as skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers followed by craft and related trade workers. 40 percent of total female youth on the average are working as skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers. A significant percentage of them are engaged in elementary occupations. Very few of youth females are employed as managers -less than 1 percent on the average during 2022-2024. Hence, youth female representation in highly skilled occupations are very low even in recent times. However, female youth representation in medium skilled work is much higher compared to highly skilled jobs. 10 percent of total female youth are working as professionals on the average during 2022-2024.

Table-11: Female Youth Employment by Occupation (in Thousand) (ISCO -08)

| Year | Managers | Professionals | Technicians and associate professionals | Clerical support workers | Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers | Service and sales workers | Craft and related trades workers | Plant and machine operators, and assemblers | Elementary occupations |
|------|----------|---------------|---|--------------------------|--|---------------------------|----------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 2024 | 55 | 1453 | 348 | 477 | 5879 | 1181 | 2621 | 232 | 2041 |
| 2023 | 128 | 1536 | 331 | 452 | 6286 | 1213 | 2508 | 130 | 2155 |
| 2022 | 271 | 1283 | 325 | 397 | 3952 | 920 | 1475 | 304 | 1775 |

Source: ILO dataset

Table-10 and Table-12 show that most of the youth female are employed in the informal sector. Female youth, who are employed in the informal sector, are mostly engaged in agricultural sector followed by non-agricultural sector during 2020-2024. 25 percent of female youth are working in the informal segment of Industry on the average during 2018-2024.

Table-12: Female Youth Informal Employment by Broad Economic Sectors during 2018-2024 (in Thousand)

| Year | Agriculture | Industry | Non-agriculture | Services | Total |
|------|-------------|----------|-----------------|----------|-------|
| 2024 | 6765 | 3265 | 6157 | 2892 | 12922 |
| 2023 | 7467 | 3116 | 6160 | 3044 | 13627 |
| 2022 | 4834 | 2305 | 4638 | 2333 | 9472 |
| 2021 | 4860 | 1848 | 4015 | 2166 | 8875 |
| 2020 | 3963 | 2037 | 4020 | 1983 | 7984 |
| 2019 | 3656 | 2404 | 4661 | 2257 | 8316 |

| | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 2018 | 2851 | 1743 | 3419 | 1676 | 6270 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|

Source: ILO dataset

Table-13 shows that most of the youth female are employed as skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers followed by craft and related trade workers in the informal sector. 44 percent of total female youth on the average are working as skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers during 2022-2024. 17 percent of total female youth on the average are working as craft and related trade workers during 2022-2024. A significant percentage of them are engaged in elementary occupations (15 percent of total youth female employment). Very few of youth females are employed as managers -less than 1 percent on the average during 2022-2024. Hence, youth female representation in highly skilled occupations are very low even in recent times in the informal sector.

Table-13: Female Youth Informal Employment by Occupations during 2018-2024 (in Thousand)

| Year | Managers | Professionals | Technicians and associate professionals | Clerical support workers | Service and sales workers | Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers | Craft and related trades workers | Plant and machine operators, and assemblers | Elementary occupations |
|------|----------|---------------|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 2024 | 26 | 1018 | 226 | 286 | 1053 | 5867 | 2526 | 176 | 1745 |
| 2023 | 96 | 1134 | 190 | 264 | 1120 | 6272 | 2446 | 117 | 1988 |
| 2022 | 245 | 821 | 141 | 215 | 815 | 3940 | 1432 | 268 | 1594 |

Source: ILO dataset

3. Conclusion

There is a rise in female youth working age population (15-24 age group) in recent times. However, rural female youth working age population is almost three times higher than urban female youth working age population in India. Urban female youth working age population becomes almost stagnant during 2018-2024 with minor year wise fluctuations. However, female youth working age population with basic education is higher than that of with advanced level of education during 2018-2024 in India. Moreover, female youth working age population with less than basic level of education is decreasing continuously in number during 2018-2024. However, the overall education level of female youth working age population has been increased in recent times.

Female youth employment with respect to respective working age population increases at national level in recent times in India. The same trend has been observed in both the rural areas and urban areas. However, employment to population ratio for youth female workers in rural areas is higher than employment to population ratio for youth female workers in urban areas in very recent times, during 2021-2024. Moreover, employment of female youth workers with respect to respective working age population has been increased for all educational categories during 2018-2024.

However, single female youth representation in labour force is higher than married female representation in labour force during 2018-2024. However, labour force participation rate of young female widowed or divorced are also visible. Interestingly, the youth female labour force is dominated by those females, who have completed their lower secondary education during 2018-2024. However, female youth labour force participation rate in urban areas is consistently low than that in rural areas in all the years during 2018-2024.

Female youth workers are mainly medium skilled workers. The share of highly skilled female youth workers is low in recent times. Youth female workers are largely employed in the informal sector. However, if we consider formal sector and informal sector both then there is an occupational shift from agriculture to non- agricultural sector; female youth are mostly employed in the non-agricultural sector. However, if we look at female youth employment only in the informal sector

then most of them are employed in the agricultural sector; no occupational shift from primary occupation. However, most of the youth female are employed as skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers followed by craft and related trade workers. A significant percentage of them are engaged in elementary occupations -15 percent of total informal youth female employment. Very few of youth females are employed as managers -less than 1 percent on the average during 2022-2024. Hence, youth female employment in highly skilled occupations is very low in India in recent times. They are mostly engaged in those occupations where high skill is not a primary requirement.

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The Role of NGO-Recruited Female Teachers in Enhancing Girls' Education in Rural India

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Abstract

This article examines the transformative role and impact of NGO-recruited female teachers on rural girls' education in India. Despite increased enrolment, girls in remote areas face persistent challenges such as early marriage, gender bias, and poor learning outcomes. NGOs like Educate Girls, CARE India, and Pratham address these barriers by recruiting and training local women as educators and community advocates. These grassroots-level female teachers promote safe, inclusive, and gender-sensitive learning environments, bridging the gap between school and society. NGOs focus more on educating the girls, rather than schooling, through their innovative pedagogical strategies, community mobilization, and the use of modern digital tools, so that they have contributed to increased enrolment, improved academic performance, and shifting social norms surrounding girls' education. By this, we can easily achieve the motto of Sustainable Development Goals by minimizing the gender gap in education and which further uplifts the girls in society as well as in the education sector. This article calls for stronger policy support, scalable training models, and collaboration between NGOs and public education. Ultimately, locally recruited female educators emerge as vital agents of change, advancing gender equity and rural educational access.

Keywords: Female Teacher, NGO, Girl Education, Rural Area, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).

1. Introduction

'Female teachers provide new and different role models for girls, especially in rural and conservative communities'.

-UNESCO Report

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a powerful driver of social change, as emphasized by international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) (United Nations, 2015). However, in rural India, many girls face different kinds of social stigma and challenges that can further hamper their access to and completion of education. Despite improvements in enrolment rates driven by government initiatives, significant challenges remain in attendance, retention, and learning outcomes, particularly at the upper primary and secondary levels (Premachandran, 2025).

ASER report (2023) indicated that, whereas almost 96% of rural girls in the 6-to-10 age groups are enrolled in school, the percentage drops dramatically among 15-to-16-year-old girls to 73%, compared to 84% among boys. The data also show that only 43% of rural girls in grade 5 can read a grade 2 text, while merely 28% can carry out basic calculations, suggesting concerns about the quality of education received. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) reports that nearly 23% of rural girls aged 15-19 are still not attending any school or training during the survey period, thus further testifying to the existing gaps in attendance (Aapke Saath Foundation, 2024). As reasons, these include early marriages, poverty, gender-based violence, and mobility restrictions. Together, these derail girls' education journey in rural areas (Panda & Gope, 2024). The situation is more challenging when Safety concerns and the lack of female role models' issues within schools came Infront because it deters consistent and regular attendance and contributes to the high dropout rates (Soondra, 2025). For instance, only 28% of rural schools have working toilets for girls, a factor often linked to higher levels of absenteeism during menstruation and increased

dropout levels (ASER, 2023). According to the World Bank (2018) and UNESCO (2020), the presence of female teachers in schools helps to increase active participation of girls in classrooms, reduces dropout rates, and creates a more secure and friendlier environment for learning. Female teachers act as role models and encourage aspirations not constrained by conventional gender roles, further motivating the families to support girls' education (UNESCO, 2020). However, in remote rural areas, it is also a challenging factor to attract and retain government-qualified female teachers due to logistical impediments and cultural dislike of postings in distant and insecure fields (Premachandran, 2025). So, from this point of view, it became a challenge that, how we can recruit and retain female teachers in those rural backward areas to provide quality education for girls.

Here, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have emerged as 'Game Changers' or 'Messiah' by recruiting, training, and deploying female teachers from local or nearby communities to promote gender-inclusive education. Programs such as Educate Girls' Team Balika, CARE India's Udaan, and Room to Read's Girls' Education Program have made a revolutionary change by recruiting grassroots female teachers as a cornerstone of their efforts. These initiatives not only increase girls' Participation in school but also challenge entrenched gender norms by empowering women as community leaders (Aapke Saath Foundation, 2024; Soondra, 2025).

This is evidenced by different program evaluations, which bring out the strength of this approach. For example, the Internal Evaluation of Educate Girls (2022) highlighted a phenomenon that 90% of girls re-enroll in out-of-school areas, and it is only possible through a process closely associated with the involvement of local female volunteers working with families and schools. Female teachers, recruited through NGOs, have been instrumental in promoting awareness and participation among the parents for promoting girls' education, which leads to better learning and motivating for continuous school participation (Premachandran, 2025).

NGOs act as social agents or catalysts for restructuring rural education by bridging the gap in the unavailability of female teachers and tearing down cultural barriers to girls' schooling. Their operational modalities are often associated with teacher recruitment along with community mobilization, gender sensitization, and innovations in teaching that are context-based and address needs within the locality (Premachandran, 2025). This overall approach serves to create an educational ecosystem that includes girls' educational access, retention, and empowerment.

So, in this Juncture, this article aims to identify effective strategies, highlight ongoing challenges along with recognition of locally recruited female educators as powerful agents of change who promote gender equity and empower marginalized rural communities, thereby contributing to broader social transformation (Premachandran, 2025; Soondra, 2025).

2. Need of the Study

Despite the mottos of various educational policies, such as the Right to Education Act, 2009, and the National Education Policy, which aim to provide universal education and gender equity, etc. indicated that, we have made much progress in girls' education, but in rural India, it has remained haphazard. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER data) has shown that even as enrolments for girls have increased, retention and learning outcomes have been comparably low. This gap may be mainly attributed to gendered barriers: social conservatism, Attitude of the parents, safety, and the absence of female role models, all of which hinder many rural girls from regular school attendance.

Female teachers are generally recognized as being an important link in defeating these barriers. Traditionally, they have been viewed as more approachable and culturally acceptable for the girls in conservative rural settings. Their presence not only makes girls feel more comfortable and encourages their participation but also serves as an essential aspirational figure. The advocacy brief on women teachers notes, 'The presence of one or more female teachers may ensure protection for girls from unwanted attention and promote more girl-friendly learning environments. Unfortunately, in many rural and tribal areas, the number of government-appointed female teachers is either few or they are hesitant to take up the posting owing to safety and logistical issues.

In this Juncture, NGOs mobilize, train, and deploy female community members as teachers, and this has a positive benefit on Community-based education. It will also address supply-side constraints and cultural acceptability to increase access to education for girls. Despite the growing relevance of this strategy, there remains limited consolidated literature for evaluating its long-term impact on educational outcomes and broader social transformation. According to a study, 'Community-led educational initiatives, driven by local leaders and stakeholders, have witnessed success in fostering a sense of ownership and relevance'. However, it will need a carefully considered appraisal to fully understand how female teacher recruitment by NGOs contributes not only to access but also to empowerment and gender equity.

This study has importance and relevance as it will fill this particular gap by systematically looking into the multi-dimensional outcomes of NGO-driven hiring of female teachers in the rural areas of India. It is intended to show how these teachers serve as agents of change-improving retention, enhancing learning, and challenging entrenched gender norms-thereby catalysing broader social transformation. It is essential to understand these dynamics to inform policy and scale effective interventions that could contribute to the sustainable advancement of girls' education in rural settings.

3. Objectives of the Study

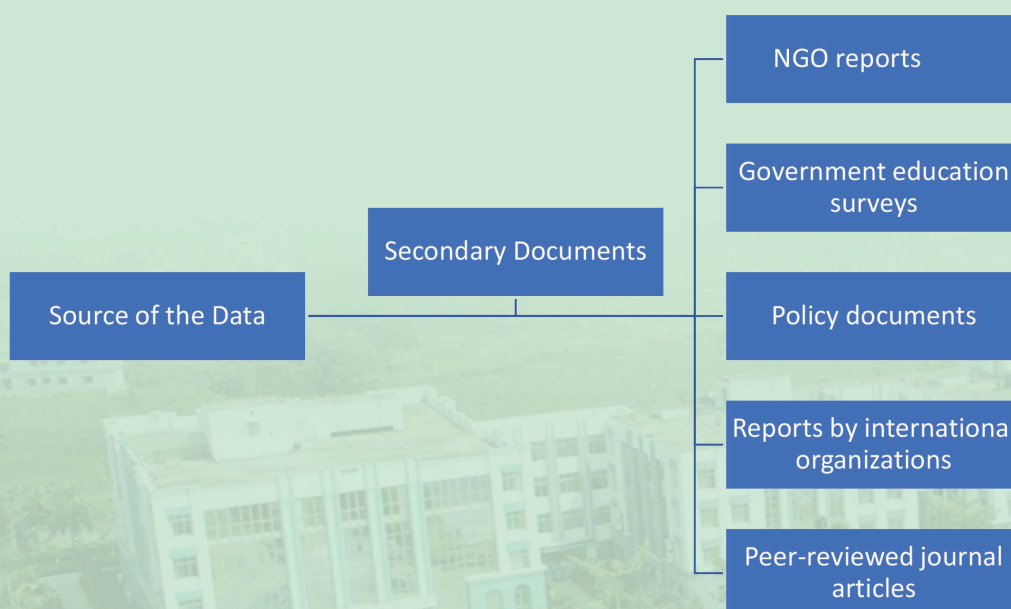
- I. To analyze the strategies and practices adopted by NGOs in recruiting and deploying female teachers in rural areas of India.
- II. To examine the impact of NGO-recruited female teachers on the educational access, retention, and empowerment of rural girl students.

4. Methodology

4.1 Source of the Data:

This study follows a qualitative review-based methodology, relying entirely on secondary data collected from:

Figure 1: Source of the Data



- i. NGO reports (e.g., Educate Girls, Pratham, CARE India, Room to Read)
- ii. Government education surveys (e.g., UDISE+, ASER)
- iii. Policy documents (e.g., NEP 2020, RTE Act)
- iv. Peer-reviewed journal articles
- v. Reports by international organizations (e.g., UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank)

4.2 Selection criteria:

Sources were selected based on relevance to the topic, publication date (2010–2024), focus on rural India, and coverage of female teacher recruitment and girls' education.

4.3 Analysis approach:

A thematic analysis was used to extract common patterns, challenges, and outcomes related to female teacher recruitment by NGOs and their impact on rural girl students.

5. Analysis and Findings

Objective 1: To analyse the strategies and practices adopted by NGOs in recruiting and deploying female teachers in rural areas of India

NGOs in rural India have adopted several innovative and context-sensitive strategies to recruit and deploy female teachers, addressing the acute shortage and unique challenges faced in these areas. These strategies not only improve the availability of female educators but also enhance girls' participation and retention in schools.

Diagram 2: Strategies and practices adopted by NGOs for engaging female teachers



a) Community-Based Recruitment

Many NGOs prioritize recruiting female teachers from the same village or nearby communities to effectively address logistical barriers such as travel difficulties and safety concerns, while ensuring socio-cultural acceptance within conservative rural settings. A NGO, namely Educate Girls, trains local women as volunteers who act as education advocates and teaching assistants, leveraging their familiarity with community norms to foster trust and encourage girls' education (Educate Girls, 2022). This local recruitment strategy also reduces teacher absenteeism and increases retention, as these women are more willing and able to work close to home. Educate Girls, operating in over 14,000 villages across Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, has mobilized over 1.4 million girls for enrollment with a 93% retention rate—largely due to the efforts of more than 14,000 locally recruited female volunteers known as Team Balika, who work without monetary incentives to improve community mindsets on girls' education (Educate Girls, 2022; UNICEF, 2020). This model has been recognized as an effective grassroots approach for building trust and shifting cultural attitudes towards female education in hard-to-reach areas.

b) Conducting Training or Capacity Building Programme

It has been shown that Many of the rural women who are teachers are not formally trained teachers, and most Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have short, intensive programmes of training with a great focus on foundational literacy and numeracy, and basic pedagogy. The Udaan program of CARE India is an example of this. In Udaan, women learn critical teaching skills in a short time then quickly posted to a school which have no female teachers (CARE India, 2020). Udaan is a special accelerated residential learning program for out-of-school girls

aged 11-14 years. During a short time of not more than 11 months, the girls complete primary education within grades one to five. This not only covers the education gap for girls, but it also involves training local women in gender-sensitive and remedial pedagogies for teaching in rural settings (CARE India, 2020). This rapid programme is designed to ensure that the urgency to fill teacher gaps does not compromise the quality of teaching, that female educators can effectively support foundational learning, and foster girls' continued school participation.

Table 1: Strategies and Practices Adopted by NGOs for Recruiting and Deploying Female Teachers in Rural India.

| Strategy/Practice | Description | Example/Source |
|--|---|---|
| Community-Based Recruitment | Recruiting female teachers from the same village or nearby areas to overcome travel, safety, and cultural barriers. This fosters trust and improves retention. | Educate Girls trains local women as volunteers and teaching assistants to leverage community familiarity. |
| Conducting Training or Capacity Building Programme | Short-term, intensive training focused on foundational literacy, numeracy, and pedagogy to quickly prepare rural women for teaching roles. | CARE India's Udaan program provides condensed teacher training to enable rapid deployment. |
| Integration with Community Mobilization | Engaging families, local leaders, and school committees alongside teacher deployment to create a supportive ecosystem, reduce dropouts, and encourage attendance. | Educate Girls mobilizes parents and communities to value girls' education and female teachers. |
| Use of Low-Cost Technologies | Providing female teachers with affordable digital tools (tablets, apps) to track student progress and deliver personalized instruction, especially in remedial education. | Pratham equips educators with tablets and apps to enhance teaching and learning monitoring. |
| Mentoring and Peer Networks | Establishing mentorship and peer support groups to reduce isolation, provide emotional support, and promote continuous professional development. | NGOs implement mentoring programs pairing new female teachers with experienced mentors. |

(Source: Collected from Selected NGO's websites)

c) Integration with Community Mobilization

NGOs combine teacher deployment with active community engagement, working closely with families, local leaders, and school management committees to build a supportive ecosystem for girls' education. This multi-layered strategy addresses social resistance and safety concerns, helping reduce dropout rates and encouraging consistent attendance (UNESCO, 2021). For example, Educate Girls mobilizes communities through village-based volunteers called Team Balika, who conduct door-to-door surveys to identify out-of-school girls and engage parents and local leaders to emphasize the importance of girls' education (Educate Girls, 2022). The program also organizes Gram Shiksha Sabhas (village education forums) and collaborates with School Management Committees to develop School Improvement Plans, fostering community ownership and accountability.

This approach has led to measurable outcomes, including enrolling over 90% of targeted girls, retaining 85% of enrolled girls, and improving learning outcomes by 25–40% in Hindi, English, and Math (Educate Girls, 2022). By integrating teacher deployment with sustained community mobilization, NGOs like Educate Girls create an enabling environment that supports girls'

education in rural India and shifts social norms around girls' schooling and empowerment (UNICEF, 2020).

d) Use of Low-Cost Technologies

Several NGOs in India have successfully integrated affordable digital tools, such as tablets loaded with educational apps, to enhance teaching effectiveness and monitor student progress in rural schools. Pratham's remedial education programs, notably Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), utilize technology to help female teachers track learning outcomes and deliver personalized instruction, particularly benefiting students who lag in foundational skills (Banerji et al., 2020). For example, Pratham's Hybrid Learning program, active in approximately 1,000 communities across Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, reaches over 60,000 students with 6,000 tablets (Pratham Education Foundation, 2022). These digital resources enable teachers to create open learning spaces and facilitate self-paced, interactive learning, which has been shown to significantly improve reading and math skills.

Such technology integration helps overcome typical resource constraints in rural schools by enabling continuous assessment and tailored support, thereby enhancing both teaching quality and student engagement (World Bank, 2021). Additionally, initiatives like eVidyaloka connect volunteer teachers with rural classrooms via digital platforms, creating remote learning environments that expand access and maintain educational continuity, especially during disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic (eVidyaloka, 2022).

Other NGOs and CSR programs, such as the Women Educators Empowerment Program by ICT Academy and R Systems, focus on training rural female teachers in digital teaching and soft skills, further strengthening their capacity to use technology effectively in classrooms (ICT Academy, 2022). Overall, the strategic deployment of low-cost digital tools and training empowers female educators in rural areas to deliver personalized, engaging, and effective instruction, helping bridge educational gaps and improve learning outcomes for marginalized students.

e) Mentoring and Peer Networks

NGOs recognize that female teachers working in remote rural areas often face isolation and a lack of professional support, which can negatively affect their motivation and retention. To address this, many NGOs establish mentoring systems and peer support groups where experienced educators or NGO staff mentor recruits. This support includes pedagogical guidance, emotional encouragement, and opportunities for continuous professional development (Ghosh & Chatterjee, 2021). For instance, the Digital Empowerment Foundation's GOAL (Going Online As Leaders) mentorship initiative connects young rural girls and female educators with urban women mentors via virtual platforms, fostering leadership, confidence, and skill development (Digital Empowerment Foundation, 2022). Such peer networks create a sense of community and shared purpose among female teachers working in isolated, resource-constrained environments, reducing attrition and promoting continuous learning (UNESCO, 2020).

These strategies reflect a comprehensive and context-sensitive approach by NGOs that tackles both supply-side challenges, such as teacher availability, training, and retention, and demand-side barriers like community acceptance and entrenched gender norms. By recruiting female teachers locally, providing targeted training, engaging communities, leveraging technology, and supporting teachers through mentorship, NGOs effectively expand the presence and impact of female educators in rural Indian schools. This not only improves educational access and quality for girls but also contributes to broader social transformation by empowering women as role models and leaders within their communities (Agarwal, 2023).

Objective 2: Impact of NGO-Recruited Female Teachers on Educational Access, Retention, and Empowerment of Rural Girl Students.

Here, researchers focus on examining the impact of NGO-recruited female teachers on the educational access, retention, and empowerment of rural girl students in India. While the shortage of female educators in rural areas has long been a barrier to girls' education, NGOs have stepped in to bridge this gap by recruiting and supporting local women as teachers. This section explores

how the presence of female teachers influences not only enrolment and classroom participation but also academic achievement and social empowerment for girls, while also acknowledging the persistent challenges faced by these educators and the communities they serve.

Table 2: Impact of NGO-Recruited Female Teachers on Girl Education

| Name of the NGO and Report | Activity | Outcome |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Educate Girls | Recruitment of Female Teachers by NGOs | Increased enrolment and retention of girls in rural schools |
| | Mobilizing Girls for School Enrollment | Mobilised millions of out-of-school students, Improved access to education for girls in rural areas |
| | Community Engagement and Attitude Shifts | Families are more likely to delay early marriages as they see the benefits of educating daughters, with girls gaining confidence and independence. |
| Room to Read | Increased Classroom Participation by Girls | Enhanced student engagement and confidence, feel safer and more understood by female teachers, fostering participation that leads to higher retention and academic aspirations |
| CARE India Pratham | Gender-Sensitive Pedagogy and Remedial Teaching | Improved academic outcomes in foundational literacy and numeracy. Reports said that Girls in NGO-led classrooms show better performance in reading and math assessments compared to government-only schools (CARE India, 2021; Pratham, 2020). |
| UNESCO Report,2021 | Serving as Role Models | Social empowerment and aspirational change for girls, encouraging delayed early marriages and aspirations beyond domestic roles, and inspiring families to invest in daughters' education. |

(Source: Collected from Selected NGO's websites)

a) Improved Enrolments and Retention

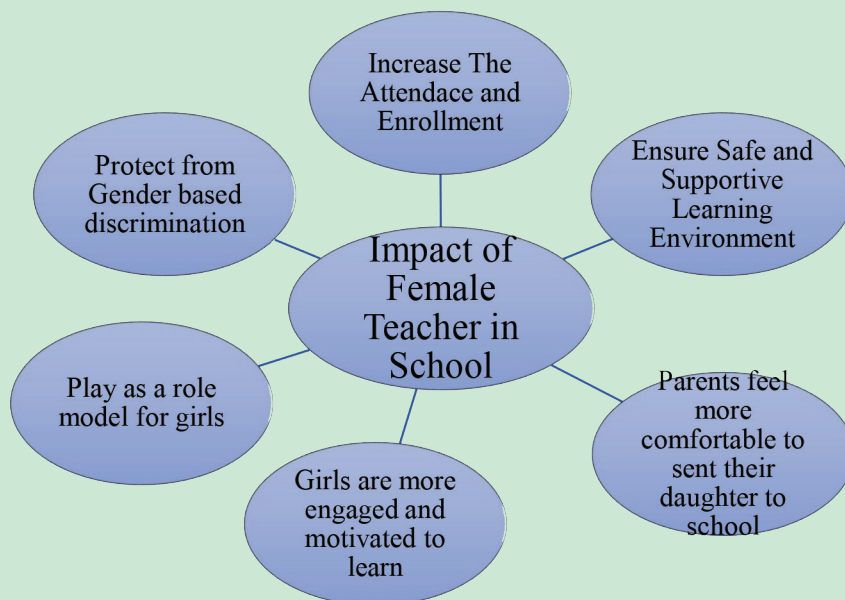
Numerous studies and programmes report demonstrate that the presence of female teachers significantly improves enrolment and retention rates of girls in rural schools. Educate Girls, a leading NGO working in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, mobilized over 411,000 out-of-school girls for enrolment in 2023-24, achieving a retention rate exceeding 87% among girls enrolled in the previous year (Educate Girls, 2024). Their community-based approach, involving local female volunteers known as Team Balika, fosters trust and parental willingness to send daughters to school, especially at upper primary levels. UNESCO also notes that 'girls' enrolment rates improve and drop-out rates reduce significantly with female teachers in schools,' highlighting the critical role female educators play in creating a safer and culturally acceptable learning environment for girls (Educate Girls, 2019-25). This evidence underscores the positive correlation between female teacher presence and enhanced educational access and continuity for rural girls.

b) Enhanced Classroom Participation

Girls taught by female teachers demonstrate significantly higher classroom participation and engagement. Different studies in educational psychology show that classrooms led by female teachers have a 20 percent higher rate of inclusive participation, fostering a safer and more supportive environment for girls (Indian Express, 2025; Muralidharan & Sheth, 2016). Data from Room to Read's Girls' Education Programme in India reveals that over 95 percent of girls enrolled in their program returned to school after COVID-19 closures, attributing part of this success to

the presence of female educators who make girls feel ‘safer’ and ‘more understood’ (Room to Read, 2018). Research by the Brookings Institution supports these findings, highlighting that girls are more likely to attend and remain in school when female teachers are present, especially in conservative rural settings (Unterhalter et al., 2014). Additionally, programmes like Educate Girls emphasize that locally recruited female teachers and volunteers act as relatable role models, enhancing girls’ academic confidence and social participation (Educate Girls, 2022). These factors collectively contribute to a more inclusive learning environment, improved academic outcomes, and greater educational aspirations among rural girls (UNESCO, 2021).

Figure 3: Impact of Female Teacher on Girl Education in Rural School



(Source: Researchers developed it from the insight)

c) Academic Achievement

Evidence from NGO-led programs such as CARE India’s Udaan and Pratham’s Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) demonstrates that girls taught by NGO-recruited female teachers achieve stronger academic outcomes in foundational reading and math compared to their peers in government-only schools (CARE India, 2020; Pratham, 2021). For example, CARE India’s Udaan program—an accelerated residential initiative for out-of-school girls aged 11–14—enables students to complete grades 1–5 in just 11 months. Over 95% of girls enrolled in Udaan have passed the fifth-grade exam, a success rate that far exceeds regional government averages for marginalized groups (CARE India, 2020). The programme’s interactive, gender-sensitive pedagogy, which includes group projects and leadership activities, helps bridge learning gaps and builds confidence among participants.

Another important Activity, Pratham’s Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, which is widely implemented in partnership with NGOs and local governments, has consistently shown that girls in TaRL-supported classrooms make greater gains in reading and arithmetic than those in standard government classrooms (Banerji et al., 2016; Pratham, 2021). These results highlight the effectiveness of combining remedial instruction with gender-responsive teaching, particularly when delivered by female educators who serve as relatable role models for rural girls. This evidence underscores that NGO-recruited female teachers, through targeted interventions and supportive pedagogical environments, play a critical role in improving academic achievement and closing learning gaps for rural girls in India.

d) Social Empowerment and Aspirational Change

Female teachers play a crucial role beyond academics by serving as powerful role models who challenge traditional gender norms in rural India. Their visibility encourages girls to envision

futures beyond domestic roles and motivates families to support girls' education, often contributing to delayed early marriages. UNESCO's advocacy brief emphasizes that 'Women teachers provide new and different role models for girls, especially in rural and conservative communities, fostering aspirations for leadership and economic independence' (UNESCO, 2021). NGOs report an observable shifts in community attitudes, noting that as girls gain confidence through education, families increasingly recognize its long-term benefits (Educate Girls, 2022; Room to Read, 2018). This transformative impact helps break entrenched gender stereotypes and promotes greater gender equity within rural educational ecosystems.

e) Challenges Remain

Despite these successes, several challenges persist in these circumstances:

- Many NGO-recruited female teachers work on low or no wages or volunteer basis, that limiting their financial security and motivation.
- Formal education systems often fail to fully recognize or integrate these teachers or educators, restricting their career growth and professional status.
- Cultural resistance in some communities continues to impede female teachers' acceptance and girls' sustained schooling.

But still studies shows that, NGO-recruited female teachers have a multifaceted positive impact on rural girls' education by increasing enrolment and retention, enhancing classroom participation, improving academic outcomes, and fostering social empowerment. However, addressing systemic challenges related to teacher remuneration, recognition, and cultural barriers remains critical to sustaining and scaling these gains.

6. Conclusion

The recruitment of female teachers by NGOs in rural India represents a transformative strategy that transcends the boundaries of traditional classroom instruction, functioning as a powerful lever for both educational advancement and social reform. These women educators not only enhance learning outcomes and increase retention rates among rural girls but also actively dismantle deep-seated gender norms by serving as trusted role models and local advocates for girls' education. Their presence fosters safer, more inclusive, and culturally sensitive learning environments—critical factors in areas where safety concerns and restrictive socio-cultural attitudes have long hindered girls' educational participation.

There is much evidence from large-scale initiatives, such as Educate Girls, that demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach. The programmes localized recruitment of female volunteers has significantly improved school attendance of girls students. These improvements are supported by broader research linking the presence of female teachers with higher enrollment, reduced dropout rates, and increased academic achievement among rural girls. Beyond education, these female teachers catalyse community-level change by challenging traditional gender roles, raising awareness, and reducing practices like early marriage. NGO-recruited female teachers are far better than instructional facilitators—they are agents of transformation who embody the intersection of empowerment, education, and grassroots activism. Their role in promoting gender equity and educational access in rural India is both crucial and catalytic. As India moves toward achieving the goals of educational equity and gender justice, it is imperative that these women, and the models that support them, receive focused attention in both policy discourse and practice. Conversely, to mitigate the gender disparity in education, it is the non-governmental organisations that have played their significant role by incorporating native female stakeholders in the recruitment process and handing over the inherent opportunities of education to one of the most marginalised sections of society, i.e., women living in rural areas. To create a congenial learning environment for girls, it is advised that NGOs work in resonance with the local communities and various stakeholders to identify innovative and efficient approaches for creating a sustainable learning environment for weaker sections of society, especially girls living in rural areas, thereby, fulfilling the goal of 'Education for All'.

7. Educational Implications of the Study:

The main educational implications of this study are as follows:

1. This study mainly focused on the Engagement of Female teachers in NGO driven rural schools. Female teachers actively engage with girls and their families to promote the importance of education, follow up on absences, and intervene in cases such as early marriage pressures.
2. This study explored that Female teachers often bring a gender-sensitive perspective to teaching, creating a more inclusive and safe learning environment for girls and promoting equitable treatment of all students.
3. This study also shows a perspective that Female teachers serve as visible role models, showing rural girls that women can pursue education, employment, and leadership. This challenges patriarchal norms and broadens career aspirations for female students.

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GLIMPSSES OF THE EVENT



Inauguration of the Centre for Gender Empowerment Studies & Research at Adamas University, in the presence of esteemed dignitaries.



Inaugural address by Dr. Kasturi Mukherjee, HoD, Department of Geography, Adamas University highlighting the vision of gender equality and empowerment.



Unveiling the Centre's plaque – a step towards inclusive research and academic progress.



An inspiring address by Prof. Snehamanju Basu highlighting the vision of gender equality and empowerment.



Words by Dr. Chiranjib Bhattacharjee, President, West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education that sparked thought, reflection, and a call for equality



An inspiring speech by Honourable MP Dr. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar that set the tone for change and empowerment.

GLIMPSES OF THE EVENT



An address by Prof. Nirmal Kanti Chakrabarti, Vice Chancellor, National University of Juridical Sciences that highlighted the strength of unity and purpose.



Bridging knowledge and action through thoughtful words by Prof. Moumita Mukherjee (Dean R&D, Adamas University)



Celebrating unity and purpose – the team behind the vision of gender empowerment.



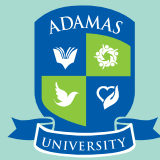
Insights by Prof. Sheli Sinha Chaudhuri, Professor, Department of ETCE, Jadavpur University and Chair, Women In Engineering, IEEE Kolkata Section that moved hearts and minds toward a better tomorrow.



A powerful voice by Dr. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar echoing the vision of inclusive progress.



A full house of enthusiastic minds, gathered to witness a meaningful beginning.



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