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ABSTRACT

Addressing inequalities is imperative not merely from the human rights perspective, but also to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth. The most basic of such inequalities are those deriving from gender. Gender inequalities effectively constrain the development potential of half the population. While the current trend of equating 'gender' with 'women' understandably dominates the literature on the subject, gender disparities are not always anti-women—disparities against men are beginning to emerge even in a strongly male-dominated country like India. Gender disparities are unacceptable—whether against men or women. This paper attempts to shift the focus from 'women' to the significance of the gender equation by assessing the intensity of gender disparity across geographic space, and enquiring into the reasons for these persisting inequalities. A basic question that needs to be answered is whether women are equally unequal across geographic space. India, with a multitude of distinct regional contexts, provides a good testing ground. As the states of the Indian union have distinct regional entities, inter-state gender disparities would reflect both economic and socio-cultural diversities grounded in historical realities.

Keywords: Gender disparities in India, gender parity index, regional variations in gender disparity, differential wages, urban-rural differences, changes in gender disparities

1 BACKGROUND

Gender studies in Asia, as in the rest of the world, tend to focus almost exclusively on women and their disparate social status, and unequal access to healthcare, education facilities, assets, and economic opportunities. While the need for such a focus in the effort to balance the heavily skewed gender equation is undeniable, the perception that 'gender' connotes the balance of power between men and women—and not a focus on women alone—has been lost along the way. Gender disparities are unacceptable, but equally unacceptable is a single-minded focus on women in scenarios where men may be equally vulnerable. A basic question that needs to be answered is whether women are equally unequal across geographic space. India—with a multitude of distinct regional contexts— provides a good testing ground.

It is hypothesised that in the case of India, class, location, and culture all play a role in the origin and persistence of set gender roles. In the case of those precariously balanced on the edge of poverty, gender disparities in education, health status, or wealth may be minuscule or non-existent. Similarly, at the other end of the income spectrum, wealth alone may suffice to wipe out basic gender inequities. The same is likely to be true, to a modified extent, in the case of rural versus urban populations representing the two ends of the spectrum. However, it is probable that in regions where gender roles and expectations are deeply rooted in tradition, changes in income and levels of development may result in overall improvement in the quality of life, yet not lead to a reduction in gender disparities.

This paper seeks to test these hypotheses by constructing a set of gender parity indices representing various measures of survival, quality of life, and empowerment. While the selection of indicators is largely governed by availability of suitable and comparable data, an attempt is made to use a large number of indicators, so that unusual distribution patterns in the case of a few indicators do not unduly influence the findings and subsequent conclusions.

2 ASSESSING REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN GENDER DISPARITY: METHODOLOGY

Gender disparity and gender equity are two ends of the same spectrum, the latter denoted by a value of unity or one. Most measures of equality/inequality assess the difference between scores attained by men and women across a broad range of indicators. Any attempt at assessing gender disparities must necessarily review a large number of indicators, as gender disparities in India cut across all spheres of life from basic survival and health issues through equality of access to nutrition, education, and healthcare to the unequal division of the outcomes of economic activity in terms of wages, employment status, and asset ownership. Most existing gender disparity indices (Huebler 2008; Filmer et al. 1997; Hausman et al.

2009) tend to be restricted to three or four indicators, probably because of the difficulty in collecting comparable data across different countries/regions. In the case of India, however, data for a large number of variables is available at state level, at least for the major states, albeit drawn from different sources. However, the selection of appropriate indicators for such an exercise is a long-drawn and cumbersome process.

To ensure that gender disparities across a broad spectrum are assessed, four sets of indicators were identified: (1) survival and health; (2) access to nutrition; (3) educational opportunities; and (4) economic status. Within each set, a number of sub-indicators, averaging around five, were identified (Table 1).

Table 1 Sets of indicators

Sets	Variables	Source
1. Survival and health	F/M ratio of life expectancy at birth, sex ratio, M/F ratio of IMR, M/F ratio of severe malnutrition, M/F ratio of severe anaemia (total 5)	Census of India, FHS-III
2. Access to nutrition	F/M ratio of frequency of consumption of milk and milk products, F/M ratio of frequency of consumption of fruit, F/M ratio of frequency of consumption of eggs, F/M ratio of frequency of consumption of chicken, fish and meat, F/M ratio of frequency of consumption of pulses (total 5)	NFHS-III
3. Educational opportunities	F/M ratio of literacy rates, F/M ratio of gross enrolment ratios in classes I-V, F/M ratio of gross enrolment ratios in classes VI-VIII (total 3)	Selected education statistics, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GoI
4. Economic status	F/M ratio of employment in the public sector, F/M ratio of employment in the private sector, F/M ratio of average daily\	Ministry of Labour, GoI

Source: Compiled by author

3 ESTIMATING GENDER DISPARITIES

At a basic level, disparities can be assessed by calculating the difference between the values attained across individual indicators or sets of indicators (composite indices).

For example,

gender disparity in primary school enrolment (PSE) = PSE $_{male}$ - PSE $_{female,}$

where PSE $_{male}$ is the primary school enrolment rate of boys and

PSE $_{female}$ is the primary school enrolment rate of girls.

Take the case of two states—State A with a PSE $_{male}$ of 100 per cent and a PSE $_{female}$ of 90 per cent and State B with a PSE $_{male}$ of 15 per cent and a PSE $_{female}$ of 5 per cent. The difference method returns a gender disparity of 10 per cent in both cases—(100 - 90) in the case of State A and (15 − 5) in the case of State B, implying an identical disparity status. However, in the first example, the relative gap between male and female attendance rates is much smaller than in the second example. Thus, this method, while appearing to capture the gender disparity between different states, suffers the disadvantage of not taking into consideration the overall level of enrolment, hence making comparisons between states at different levels of development inaccurate.

A more useful measure is the gender parity index (GPI), which is the ratio of female to male values. A GPI of 1 signifies gender parity, while values above and below unity indicate disparity in favour of women and against women, respectively. For example,

$$\text{GPI of primary school enrolment} = \frac{\text{PSE}_{female}}{\text{PSE}_{male}}$$

The advantages of using the ratio method over the difference method can be clarified through an example. Method 1 detailed above returned an equal disparity value of 10 per cent for both State A and State B. Method 2, however, reveals different results. The GPI for State A is 90/100= 0.9, while that of State B is 5/15= 0.33, indicating much higher gender parity in the case of State A. The difference between the male and female values is 10 per cent in both cases but the GPI is either 0.9 or 0.33. In the case of higher enrolment rates, the country is much closer to gender parity—a GPI of 1—than in the case of lower attendance rates. As a measure of equality or inequality, the GPI is therefore more precise (for further details on estimating gender parity, see Huebler 2008.

In the case of negative indicators like infant mortality ratios, malnourished population, anaemic population, etc., the ratio is reversed and calculated as M/F to render the data comparable and additive.

In the case of India, however, this basic GPI is often incapable of capturing the fine nuances of gender disparity between regions/states. Many of the indicators are so heavily weighted against women that assessing disparities on the basis of existing standards or norms tends to lump all states into the same category and fails to capture the subtle variations in the performance of different states. Quite often, all states fall in the category of gender disparity against women, i.e., a GPI below unity. To offset this problem, the parity norms in this study have been broadened to include values between 0.96 and 1.04. This is to ensure that states nearing gender parity are not summarily grouped with those still recording sharp gender disparities.

However, in the case of certain indicators, even these broadened norms do not suffice, and not a single state falls in the gender parity category of 0.96-1.04. In such cases, an attempt is made to sub-categorise states within the gender disparate group, based on the extent of disparity, as has been done with the economic indicators in this paper. The break-ups are as follows: Set A: [(1) <0.50, (2) 0.50-0.75, (3) > 0.75] or Set B: [(1) <0.66, (2) 0.66-0.75, (3) >0.75] depending on the data distribution.

As mentioned above, comparable data is available only for the major states,[1] hence the exercise is limited to the 20 major states of India. Gender disparities have been assessed for a total of 22 indicators. The methodology follows the steps listed below.

1. The GPI on each variable is calculated for each state.
2. The GPI for each set of variables is summed and averaged for each state.
3. The states are classified into three categories for each indicator individually, and also for each of the four sets of indicators, as below:
   a. states achieving or nearing gender parity;
   b. states where gender disparity against women persists; and
   c. states where gender disparity against men exists
4. The states are then classified on the basis of a composite index derived from all 22 indicators (see appendix table).

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Survival and Health

The first set of indicators seeks to assess gender disparities in basic survival and health. The indicators are sex ratios, life expectancy at birth, and infant mortality rates reflecting survival; and moderately/severely underweight adults (ages 15–40) and adults with severe anaemia (ages 15–40) reflecting health status. Sex ratios or the number of females per thousand

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[1] Larger states.

males are the simplest means of identifying India's 'missing women'. The fall in the sex ratio in several states over the past few censuses has set alarm bells ringing, raising the spectre of female foeticide, neglect, and unequal treatment of girls in infancy and childhood, and even unusually high rates of maternal mortality. Infant mortality rates could well reflect the difference in caring and access to medical treatment for male and female infants. Life expectancy at birth reflects the differential probability of survival of men and women. Anaemia and malnutrition are the two most common health problems affecting almost half the women in India and preventing them from achieving their full potential, either physically or mentally. What is less well known is that men are also prone to both these nutrition-related health problems.

Table 2 Gender parity scores of major Indian states

	Disparity against Women	Gender Parity	Disparity against Men
Survival and Health	Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, West Bengal	Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, UP	None
Access to Nutrition	Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka*, Kerala*, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal*	Assam, Gujarat	None
Educational Opportunities	Andhra Pradesh, Assam*, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana*, Himachal Pradesh*, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra*, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu*, Uttarakhand*, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal*	Kerala, Punjab	None
Economic Status	All	None	None
Composite Index	All	None	None

Note: States scoring a GPI of 0.90 0.96 (nearing gender parity) are marked with an asterisk.
Source: Author s calculations

Data on gender disparities on these two indicators alone could help identify whether such common health problems afflict women alone or both men and women. Classifying the states/regions on the basis of the composite survival and health index expectedly reveals 12 of 20 states where women are at a disadvantage. However, seven states record gender parity for this indicator. As hypothesised, the states nearing gender parity fall into two main categories—those with the highest per capita GDP (Gujarat, Kerala, and Punjab) and those with the lowest (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh). The single exception is Karnataka, which falls in the medium per capita GDP category. These findings support the hypothesis that gender disparities tend to be minimal in regions where poverty is manifest. Low incomes equally impact the access of men and women to nutrition, clean drinking water, sanitation, and healthcare—all the necessary components for good health and longevity. The same equity holds true at the other extreme where higher income levels ensure better and more equal access to healthcare and also, perhaps, nutrition.

4.2 Access to Nutrition

Differential access to nutrition within households is common in India. Preferential treatment in intra-household food distribution in favour of males is a deeply entrenched and age-old custom. Women and, by extension, girls customarily eat last and, when supplies are insufficient, eat least. In times of food shortage, a common coping strategy is to cut amounts consumed and the number of meals. This usually begins with women and girls, and other family members follow only when supplies threaten to run out. This practice is one of the factors underlying the persistence of female malnutrition and low birth weight infants in the country, given that most rural households face several months of food distress on a recurring seasonal basis (Ramachandran 2005). Additionally, it has been observed that more expensive foods—first class proteins, dairy products, and fruit—are usually unequally distributed in favour of males intra-household. It was possible to assess gender differentials in access to nutrition as the NFHS-3[2] has introduced a schedule to collect information on access to various food groups at least once a week by gender.

A composite index was constructed using F/M ratios of access to (1) milk and milk products, (2) fruit, (3) eggs, (4) fish, poultry, and meat, and (5) pulses.

The table reveals that only two states—Assam and Gujarat—have achieved gender parity in access to nutrition. In all other states, scores are overwhelmingly against females. A closer look at the score, however, reveals that four states—Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and West Bengal—have composite scores above 0.9 or nearing parity. In this case again, Gujarat ranks among the states with highest per capita GDP, while Assam represents the lowest GDP group.

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[2] National Family Health Survey 3 (2005-06).

4.3 Educational Performance

The educational status of women could well prove to be the prime mover of empowerment. Not only does education open the doors to economic progress, but also the often more inaccessible paths to health, nutrition, and total well-being. Set 3 is composed of three sub-indicators: (1) F/M ratio of literacy rates; (2) F/M ratio of gross enrolment rates in classes I-V (primary); and (3) F/M ratios of gross enrolment rates in classes 6–8 (upper primary). While data on secondary schooling and higher education is also available, the disparity between women and men tends to increase sharply with each increase in the level of education. Thus, any positive trend towards equity in basic educational levels would be masked by the distorting effect of male dominance at higher levels of education.

As in the case of other sets, the overwhelming majority of states fall in the category of gender discrimination against women. Two states alone—Kerala and Punjab—have reached gender parity. Although both are in the highest economic development group, Kerala has the highest literacy rates and the highest school enrolment ratios and Punjab low literacy rates and very low school enrolment ratios. Thus, in this context, parity at higher and lower levels is evident again. Among the states recording discrimination against women, however, seven states record an index value of 0.90–0.95, indicating at least a trend towards gender parity.

4.4 Economic Status

Assessing gender differentials in access to outcomes—more specifically, the outcomes of economic activity—is a complex issue. Women's participation in economic activities in India and in South Asia often has a negative connotation, and women undertake paid work only when earning males cannot support the family single-handed. This employment is often transitional; women drop out of the job market as family finances become more stable (Kabeer 2003). Thus, most work by women in India is on the family farm or enterprise—unpaid and unrecognised. For similar reasons, it is difficult to meaningfully compare statistics on unemployment. However, employment in the private or public formal/organised sector is sought after and may provide more realistic estimates of female-male differentials.

The other much researched aspect is that of wages. Differential wages for any form of employment are a reality in every part of the country. Much has been written about this aspect of gender discrimination, but it continues largely unchanged. Gender disparities in rural wages have also been included in this set as the Ministry of Labour, Government of India collects monthly data on wages for agricultural activities with male–female break-ups.

The composite index is made up of F/M ratios of:[3]

1. employment in the public sector;
2. employment in the private sector;
3. wages for sowing;
4. wages for weeding;
5. wages for transplanting;
6. wages for harvesting; and
7. wages for unskilled labour.

All states experience gender disparity against women, but there are variations within the scores. The scores are thus re-classified to indicate states where economic disparity against women is highest (F/M ratio <0.50 less than half of male values), where F/M ratios lie between 0.50 and 0.66 (one-half to two-thirds of male values), and states where F/M ratios are >0.66 + or more than two-thirds of male values. This modified classification places Maharashtra in the category with the lowest F/M ratios or maximum gender discrimination against women, while Assam, Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka, and West Bengal emerge as states with the most equitable distribution of economic benefits. Once again, Gujarat and Kerala are states with the highest GDP levels, while Assam falls in the lowest category. All other states fall in the medium category with women securing half to two-thirds of the benefits accrued by men, whether in the form of employment or wages.

4.5 Composite Index

The variation in the performance of states with reference to gender parity is clearly brought out in the foregoing analysis. The largest number of states (seven) achieving gender parity on any one set of indicators is in the case of survival and health indicators, with not a single state attaining a GPI of 1 or near 1 in the case of economic indicators. As the number of states achieving parity on individual sets of indicators varies from set to set, an attempt is made in this section to assess the level of gender disparity among the states with reference to a composite index comprising all four sets of variables. Not a single state achieves gender parity on the composite index or comes close. Kerala is the single state achieving a score above 0.90, which could be said to reflect 'approaching gender parity status'.

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[3] While wage data is collected for a large number of activities, data for most states was available for only five activities. Hence the analysis is restricted to these.

Table 3 Composite GPI: State-wise scores and ranks

State	Gender Parity Score	Rank
Kerala	0.912517	1
Gujarat	0.88808	2
Assam	0.887266	3
Karnataka	0.859313	4
West Bengal	0.858996	5
Tamil Nadu	0.827364	6
Andhra Pradesh	0.827173	7
Bihar	0.805749	8
Madhya Pradesh	0.798603	9
Uttar Pradesh	0.797798	10
Maharashtra	0.775815	11
Haryana	0.755401	12
Orissa	0.725114	13
Punjab	0.678072	14
Uttarakhand	0.675047	15
Rajasthan	0.671259	16
Jammu & Kashmir	0.665357	17
Chhattisgarh	0.635352	18
Himachal Pradesh	0.609658	19
Jharkhand	0.567379	20

Source: Author's calculations

Of the 20 major states, nearly half, i.e., nine states record composite scores of less than 0.75, i.e., women's scores are less than three-fourths of men's scores across all four indices of survival and health, access to nutrition, educational opportunity, and economic status on average. It had been hypothesised earlier that gender parity is more likely to exist in the most developed or the most backward states. Taking the top three states with scores of over 0.88, this hypothesis seems proven once again as Kerala and Gujarat are in the category of high per capita GDP, while Assam is in the lowest per capita GDP category.

To further analyse the performance on the composite gender parity index, particularly in view of the poor scores of most states, the states were re-classified into three categories:

1. those achieving composite scores of less than 0.66, i.e., where women score less than two-thirds of the values scored by men;
2. those achieving scores of 0.66 0.75, i.e., where women score values between two-thirds and three-fourths of those achieved by men; and
3. those achieving scores equal to or above 0.75, i.e., at least three-fourths of the values scored by men.

The disparity between women and men is less than 25 per cent in most states (10), although no state has achieved gender parity (Table 4). Only three states   Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Himachal Pradesh   fall in the category of highest disparity between women and men, where women score less than two-thirds of male scores.

Table 4 Classification of states based on composite scores of gender parity

Composite Score <0.65	Composite Score 0.66-0.74	Composite Score.0.75
Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand	Orissa, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Jammu & Kashmir	Kerala, Gujarat, Assam, Karnataka, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Haryana

Source: Author s calculations

5 ARE GENDER DISPARITIES DECREASING?

While the foregoing analysis reviews the current status of gender disparity across the Indian states, it may prove useful to assess trends in gender disparity for various indicators. Time series data is available for only a few variables. Hence, this section only attempts to seek positive/negative trends in gender disparities with respect to a few selected indicators and not across the board.

5.1 Sex Ratios (2001 vs. 1991)

Sex ratios or the number of females per thousand males is a standard indicator of gender disparity. The ideal situation is one of equity, which has been achieved only in Kerala, where women even have a slight edge over men (GPI= 1.058). Even a decade ago, Kerala

recorded a ratio above unity. In fact, there has been a slight improvement in the ratio. This may, however, not be a wholly positive indicator in the case of this state, but may reflect the large scale emigration of males to the Middle East in search of livelihoods. The cause for alarm, however, is that sex ratios have fallen during this decade in six states, of which five have the highest per capita GDP and are in the most developed category—Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Maharashtra—as well as Madhya Pradesh in the low income group.

5.2 Literacy Rates (2001 vs. 1991)

The increase in literacy rates in India after Independence has been much slower than expected, particularly so in the case of women. However, some progress has been made and every state has seen an increase in the literacy levels of both men and women. This section tries to identify states where gender differentials between female and male literacy levels have reduced rapidly as against those where the gap is closing only slowly.

Even the last census (2001) found not a single state with gender parity in literacy levels with even the most advanced state of Kerala recording a score of only 0.93. A comparison between gender differentials in literacy in 1991 and 2001 could perhaps highlight states which have seen rapid reduction of gender disparities in literacy (Table 5).

Table 5 Change in gender parity in literacy

	<0.50	0.50–0.75	>0.75
F/M Ratio of Literacy Rates (1991)	Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh	Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal	Kerala, Punjab
F/M Ratio of Literacy Rates (2001)	NIL	Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand	Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal

Source: Author's calculations

During 1991, four of the largest and most backward states in the country—Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan recorded F/M ratios of less than 0.50. A decade later, the literate female population equals the literate male population in all four states. An equally positive development is the much larger number of states with gender parity ratios of 0.75 and above. However, in most states, the literate female population is just one-half to three-quarters of the literate male population, far indeed from gender parity.

5.3 Wage Rates (1999–2000 vs. 1993–94)

To assess whether gender disparities in economic aspects are reducing over time, and to identify the states where a positive trend can be identified and vice versa, we compare real wages at 1999–2000 prices for females and males in agricultural and non-agricultural occupations for two time periods 1993-94 and 1999-2000, obtained from the NSS. The table below classifies states according to gender parity in agricultural wages.

Table 6 Gender parity in agricultural wages

	GPI <0.66	0.66-0.75	<0.75
1993–94	Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh	Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, West Bengal
1999–2000	Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu	Karnataka, Rajasthan	Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal

Source: NSSO, various years

The table reveals a slight increase in the number of states where female agricultural wages are at least 75 per cent of male wages. However, only a single state, i.e., Punjab has actually achieved gender parity with a ratio of 1.04 (1999–00). Looking at it from the other viewpoint, this implies that Punjab has begun to record gender discrimination in agricultural wages against men, even if women have only a marginal edge. Tamil Nadu records the highest gender wage disparity with an F/M ratio of only 0.57. A greater cause of concern is the fact that seven states record a decline in F/M ratios of agricultural wages. This includes

both developed states like Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh on the one hand and economically backward states like Rajasthan and Assam on the other, in further support of the basic hypothesis.

Gujarat records the highest gender parity (ranging between 0.97 and 0.99) even in current (2008) wages for individual agricultural activities (weeding, transplanting, harvesting, and unskilled labour) and Maharashtra the sharpest gender disparities, with female wages ranging between 0.59 and 0.63 of male wages. Tamil Nadu has the highest gender disparity in the case of sowing (GPI of 0.56) and Bihar the lowest (GPI of 0.87).

In the case of non-agricultural occupations in rural areas, the situation appears to be much worse with a large number of states falling in the lowest gender parity category where women receive less than two-thirds of male wages. The situation of non-agricultural occupations in rural areas, the lowest gender parity category, appears to be much worse— women receive less than two-thirds of male wages in many states. Not much improvement can be discerned in 1999–2000, where only one state—Uttar Pradesh—shows F/M ratios above 75 per cent. However, three more states have moved to the medium category of female wages—between two-thirds and three-fourths of male wages. Tamil Nadu records the highest gender disparity in agricultural and non-agricultural wages, with female wages amounting to just 0.44 per cent of male wages.

Also, three states—Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar—record an increase in gender wage disparity over the six-year period. Thus, in the case of wages, gender parity seems unrelated to development levels.

Table 7 Gender parity in non-agricultural wages

	GPI <0.66	0.66-0.75	<0.75
1993–94	Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal	Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh	
1999–2000	Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu	Assam, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal	Uttar Pradesh

Source: NSSO, various years.

6 DO URBAN/RURAL ENVIRONMENTS IMPACT GENDER DISPARITY?

Presumably, urban environments would imply greater gender equity in access to various services as well as in outcomes. This would largely result from greater availability of various services, as well as higher incomes and higher literacy/education levels in towns and cities vs. the rural hinterland. An attempt is made here to compare gender equity ratios on selected indicators for which urban–rural break-ups were available.

6.1 Sex Ratios

While overall sex ratios in India are at unacceptably low levels, with only Kerala emerging with a ratio just above unity, urban–rural break-ups bring out a different picture (Table 8).

Table 8 Classification of states by rural/urban sex ratios 2001 (females per 1000 males)

	<900	900-999	1000	> 1000
Rural	Haryana, Punjab	Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal	Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand	Kerala
Urban	Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan	Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu	Uttarakhand	Kerala, Orissa

Source: Census of India 2001.

The table reveals that highly skewed and negative sex ratios in most states are concentrated in urban areas. A sex ratio of less than 900 females per 1000 males in rural areas occurs in only two states—Punjab and Haryana—whereas the same negative ratios occurs in urban areas in 11 states. Only three states have achieved gender parity and above

in both urban and rural areas. Kerala and Uttarakhand[4] record gender parity in both rural and urban areas, but Orissa records gender parity in urban areas alone as does Chhattisgarh in rural areas. The anomaly here is that the neglect of female children and female foeticide, which underlie low sex ratios, seem to result from a deep-rooted cultural aversion to female children rather than the compulsions of ignorance and poverty.

6.2 Attendance Ratios in Primary Schools

Attendance ratios are usually more representative of the situation in schools than enrolment ratios, as enrolment is often a mere formality confined to school registers. A comparison of F/M enrolment ratios in rural vs. urban areas would help investigate further the issue of differential gender disparity based on location. It must be emphasised here that attendance ratios in urban areas are likely to be higher than in rural areas, and this is particularly so at the upper primary level. However, the gender disparity in attendance levels is of interest here—not the absolute level of school attendance.

Table 9 State-wise gender parity in attendance levels: Classes 1–5 (1995–96)

	GPI <0.90	GPI 0.90-0.99	GPI 1.00+
Rural	Andhra Pradesh, Bihar*, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir*, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan*, Uttar Pradesh*, West Bengal	Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu	Assam, Kerala
Urban	Bihar, Haryana, Punjab	Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal	Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu

Note: * indicates a GPI below 0.75

Source: Author s calculations

[4] As mentioned above, in the case of Kerala, gender parity in sex ratios is probably a result of large scale emigration to the Middle East. Similarly, in Uttarakhand, as in most Himalayan states, men traditionally migrate to seek livelihoods, leaving women behind to tend the family lands. Thus, equity in both these cases may be a negative feature for women rather than a positive outcome.

Overall, as expected, gender disparities in primary school attendance are sharp in rural areas   girls attendance rates are less than 90 per cent of boys in 10 states and less than 75 per cent in four states. However, there is gender parity in attendance rates in the rural areas of two states   Assam and Kerala   and in the urban areas of four states   Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. Surprisingly, however, girls have an edge over boys in school attendance in rural areas of Punjab, Assam, and Kerala, but the opposite holds true in urban areas.

Thus, it appears that simple generalisations on the likelihood of reducing gender disparities in urban areas do not hold in the Indian context, whether considering indicators of survival or empowerment. Gender disparity is less in rural areas than in urban areas within some states on certain indicators; this seems to imply that availability and access play a less controlling role than social factors in the persistence of gender disparities.

7 ARE GENDER DISPARITIES ONLY AGAINST WOMEN?

Overall, it is evident that gender disparities against women persist in every sphere and that gender parity has not been achieved in a single state/region. This holds true for each of the four sets of indicators, as well as the composite index. However, one of the hypotheses put forward in this paper was that gender disparities are not limited to women alone, but probably negatively impact men too, at least in some parts of the country. To explore this issue further, the GPI for individual indicators was reviewed, with revealing results. In the case of selected indicators from three sets   (1) survival and health; (2) access to nutrition; and (3) access to education   states where men are disadvantaged as against the usual status of disadvantaged women have emerged (Table 10).

Table 10 States with gender disparity against men

1. Survival and Health	
a. F/M ratio of life expectancy at birth	Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala
b. Sex ratios (2001)	Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala
c. F/M ratio of moderately/extremely	Kerala, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand thin adults with BMI below 17.0
d. F/M ratio of severe anaemia	Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh
2. Access to Nutrition	
a. F/M ratio of weekly consumption of fruit	Bihar, Jharkhand
b. F/M ratio of weekly consumption of eggs	Gujarat

c. F/M ratio of weekly consumption of chicken/ meat/fish	Gujarat
3. Access to Education	
a. F/M ratio of net attendance rates in classes I-V (Rural)	Assam
b. F/M ratio of net attendance rates in classes VI-VIII (Rural)	Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh
c. F/M ratio of net attendance rates in classes I-IV (Urban)	Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu
d. F/M ratio of net attendance rates in classes VI-VIII (Urban)	Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, West Bengal

Source: Author s calculations.

Summing across all 11 indicators, the frequency of occurrence is highest for the state of Gujarat (6). The state records gender disparity against men with reference to survival and health indicators and nutrition, as also in net attendance ratios for lower primary classes in urban areas. Kerala with a frequency of 4 records disadvantaged males in survival and health indicators, and in net attendance ratios in upper primary classes in urban areas. In all other states, frequency of occurrence is limited to 1 or 2. Conspicuous by their absence are four states, where gender disparity against men does not exist even on a single indicator. These are Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Orissa, where it may be stated that gender disparities against women are deep-rooted and permit no deviance.

8 SUMMING UP

This paper sought to answer one basic question: Are women equally unequal across geographic space? Using India as a testing ground, the foregoing analysis has proved beyond doubt that gender disparity is still deeply entrenched, but the intensity of the disparity varies across space. The controlling factors are class, location and tradition.

The following hypotheses were made.

■ Gender parity is likely to be highest in regions/states with the highest and lowest development levels, as both poverty and wealth tend to wipe out variations in access to both the means and the outcomes of development.

■ Gender disparity is not necessarily an issue of women alone, but may adversely affect men too.

■ Geographic location in terms of urban rural space is likely to affect the extent of disparity, with urban areas tending towards greater gender parity.

- Regions where gender roles are deeply rooted in culture and tradition may achieve higher levels of development without significantly reducing gender disparities.

The analysis reveals the following.

- Across all four sets of indicators, gender parity is highest in the most developed and the least developed states.

- Where economic status is concerned, gender disparities remain sharp. The economic focus in this paper has been on rural wages, both agricultural and non-agricultural. While only a single state, Punjab, has achieved gender parity in agricultural wages, there is a slight improvement in the F/M ratio of wages in many states. However, this positive trend is negated by the fall in F/M wage ratios in as many as seven states. Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra consistently record the highest wage disparities. In non-agricultural occupations, gender wage disparities are even sharper with not a single state even nearing gender parity. However, there has been a shift towards higher female wages in three states. To further bear out the hypothesis of lower gender disparities at both ends of the spectrum, Uttar Pradesh, a state with one of the lowest economic and human development levels, records the highest gender parity in non-agricultural wages (0.82) and above 0.75 in the case of agricultural wages.

- Gender disparity against men does exist with reference to individual indicators related to survival and health, nutrition and education. The states with frequent occurrence of gender disparity against males are Gujarat and Kerala, while states recording absolutely no disparity against males are Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Orissa.

- Simple generalizations on the likelihood of gender disparities reducing in urban areas do not hold true in the Indian context, whether considering indicators of survival or empowerment. The fact that within some states there is less gender disparity in rural as against urban areas, with respect to certain indicators, seems to imply that availability and access play a less controlling role than social factors in the persistence of gender disparities.

- Gender disparities have reduced across time, even if only the last two decadal censuses are considered. This positive development has taken place when considering basic survival indicators or empowering factors. While no state of the country has yet achieved perfect gender parity, Kerala is not unexpectedly the state closest to achieving this status. What is unexpected, however, is the fact that even the most economically developed states are backsliding into greater gender disparity where basic survival as represented by sex ratios is concerned. This is occurring in both the most developed and the most backward states.

- While education and health status appear to show reducing gender disparity, which may, perhaps, be attributed to Government interventions in the form of improved provision of health and education services, aspects of gender discrimination falling within the purview of the household seem to be slow to change, and even show recurrence, despite improvement in economic status. The specific reference here is to the declining or poor sex ratios in most states and to the totally biased intra-household distribution of choice/expensive foods.

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