

# Rising Gender Inequities in India: The Case of Authoritarian Patriarchy\*

Meghna Sabharwal

In 2014, India elected a populist government, the Bharatiya Janata Party, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In line with other populist leaders, such as the former U.S. President, Donald J. Trump, President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of Hungary, and President Erdoğan of Turkey, Narendra Modi has brought about a rise in Hindu nationalism that promulgates values steeped in fundamental religious practices promoting the interests of the majority Hindu community at the expense of religious minority groups and marginalized and disenfranchised people of lower castes. A rise in gendered conservative norms deeply embedded in patriarchy and ethnonationalism has created a clear division in gender roles in nation-building. This study will utilize a social equity framework to examine ways in which systems of oppression, inequities, discrimination, and bias are maintained across gender, caste, and religion and perpetuated under the name of authoritarian patriarchy in India.

## Gender Roles in India: A Historical Overview

The symbolic role played by women in Indian society, who are elevated to the level of goddesses with ultimate divine powers, is juxtaposed with how women are often treated. Womanhood in India is a construction of archetypal roles embodied by various goddesses revered by Hindus—these roles typically include those of mother (*mata*), nurturer, life-giver, protector, wife, daughter, and provider. These goddesses are always associated with a male figure and shown as the wife, daughter, sister, or mother. At the same time, according to a recent survey of 30,000 adults in India, 64% of women and men overwhelmingly agree that a wife must obey her husband, while close to 25% believe that women face discrimination (Evans et al. 2022). Thus, on the surface, women in India are revered, while their roles in society are, in reality, deeply gendered and restricted to the familial responsibilities of childbearing and caregiving (Bose 2010).

To understand the role of women, one must have some insight into the ancient texts and scriptures that form the basis of the society's structure and organization and the ways in which upper-caste masculine social dominance (Brahmanical patriarchy) is maintained. While it is beyond the scope of this article to go into any depth on this subject, a brief account of the rules and regulations of the time as they relate to caste and gender structures

are highlighted. The Hindu classical texts and religious scriptures and the two greatest epics (the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*), laid out the role of women in the society with an emphasis on *pativrata* (devotion/loyalty of a wife to her husband). However, these texts also denounce the dowry and disrespect of women (Adhikari 2020a; Gupta 1994). The scriptures and texts are also written in Sanskrit and open to interpretation, often by Hindu fundamentalists, who use them to their own benefit.

India's moral and ethical code is described in an ancient text written around the second century BC, the *Manu Smriti* (also known as the *Mânava-Dhârmashastra* or the "Textbook of Human Ethics"). It was written by Manu, a mythological figure believed to be the son of God Brahma and the first human on earth (Jaishankar and Halder 2019; Olivelle and Olivelle 2005). Hinduism is heavily influenced by the principles described in the 2,700 verses and 12 chapters of the *Manu Smriti* along with other texts, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, *Bhagavad Gita*, 18 Puranas, Dharmashastras, *Mahabharata*, and *Ramayana*, which provide the basis for the social, cultural, political, and religious practices that constitute the "Hindu way of life." The *Manu Smriti* is often criticized by scholars and statesmen, who blame the current suffering of women in India and the structures that continue to divide the society into four castes (*varnas*) on

\* Paper prepared for delivery at the Social Equity Summit, a *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* kickoff event, October 6–8, 2022, Charlottesville, Virginia.

the sexist and casteist description in the text (Adhikari 2020a; Elst 2008; Mahey 2003). The four castes include the Brahmins (the highest caste and the writers of these texts), Kshatriyas<sup>1</sup> (the second caste made up of the warriors), Vaishyas (the third caste made up of the traders/merchants), and Shudras (the fourth caste made up of the laborers). In addition to these, the Scheduled Castes (Dalits) and the Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis) are classified as Avarna (outside the *varna*/caste system).

The *Manu Smriti* was not translated until 1794, when William Jones, a British judge of the Bengal Supreme Court, came across this ancient book. With the help of Sanskrit scholars, he translated the text and incorporated components of it into Hindu law. The significance of the text is described by Savarkar (2000) as follows:

The Manusmriti is that scripture which is most worshipable after Vedas for our Hindu Nation and which from ancient times has become the basis of our culture-customs, thought and practice. This book, for centuries, has codified the spiritual and divine march of our nation. Even today, the rules which are followed by crores (millions) of Hindus in their lives and practice are based on the Manusmriti. Today The Manusmriti is the Hindu Law. That is fundamental. (Savarkar 2000, 415–416)

The majority of the text describes the duties and roles of the first two *varnas*, while only two of the 10 verses are dedicated to Vaishyas and Shudras. Clearly, the focus of the text was to provide guidelines to maintain a Brahmanical patriarchy, in which upper castemen safeguard the purity of upper-caste women by controlling their sexuality to prevent their union with men of lower castes. Men were also given authority over women's conduct based on the concept that "the wicked and essential nature of women then must be subordinated and conquered by the virtue of the ideal wife. Once the tension between 'nature' and 'culture' is resolved women can emerge triumphant as paragons of virtue" (Chakravarti 1993, 583). Chapter 9 of the text provides instructions for men to always guard their women, writing explicitly that women should not be

given any independence. Fathers protect and guard them in their childhood, husbands in their youth, and sons in their old age. This form of social control and paternalism is evident in today's India, where moral police (or Anti-Romeo) squads patrol the streets of the largest state Uttar Pradesh to provide security to women. Furthermore, the *Manu Smriti* legitimizes the oppression and exploitation of lower-caste women.

I will return to the discussion of these extreme measures in the section describing violence against women (which can be triggering for some readers, in which case I not only provide trigger warnings, but also encourage taking pauses and walking away if necessary and returning to the discussion at your own pace). It is important to note that gender and caste-based violence against women is an age-old problem, and much has been documented by scholars from the global south (see Bansode 2021; Datta and Satija 2020; Deshpande 2002, 2007; Kumar 2021; Rege 1996, 1998; Sabharwal and Sonalkar 2015). Thus, the oppression faced by women belonging to lower caste and religious minority groups is not a result of the current government, but as highlighted in this article, are exacerbated by the majoritarian and authoritarian political forces that rule India today.

To examine some of the gender inequities that currently exist in Indian society and are deepening under the current political regime, this study will apply Susan Gooden's (2014) social equity framework to build on a three-pronged approach that emphasizes (a) identifying the inequity/ies (name), (b) examining the root causes of the inequity/ies (blame), and (c) suggesting ways to take meaningful action to eliminate the inequity/ies (claim). I also utilize the intersectionality lens (see research by Crenshaw 1989, 1991) to study complex issues of gender, caste, religion, and class in India. The next section will identify the major current issues and causes of gender inequities in India and suggest ways forward.

### Gender Inequities in India (Identifying the Inequities)

India is the largest democracy in the world and espouses

<sup>1</sup> In full disclosure, I was born into a Kshatriya Hindu family and have enjoyed the privileges of belonging to a dominant upper-caste section of the society where I did not have to live at the intersections of class, caste, and religion (minoritized and oppressed groups). When I emigrated to the United States for graduate education, I traversed from a state of privilege to one of underprivilege. As a foreign-born Asian minority female with an accent, I immediately recognized my marginalized status in the society, and my lack of privilege was evident in my experience of otherness. I also acknowledge that it is not my place to retell the stories of the oppressed, and it is not my intent to co-opt the struggles faced by Dalit women and minorities. While I write from a point of privilege, I am deeply concerned by the state of women at the intersection of caste, religion, and class in current day India.

the values of freedom and equality of rights to its citizens. By several indications, violence against women (including rape and murder) are on the rise, especially among women of lower castes and minority communities. This study will also examine the most recent ban on the hijab and the lack of religious freedom in a secular nation alongside the issue of declining labor participation.

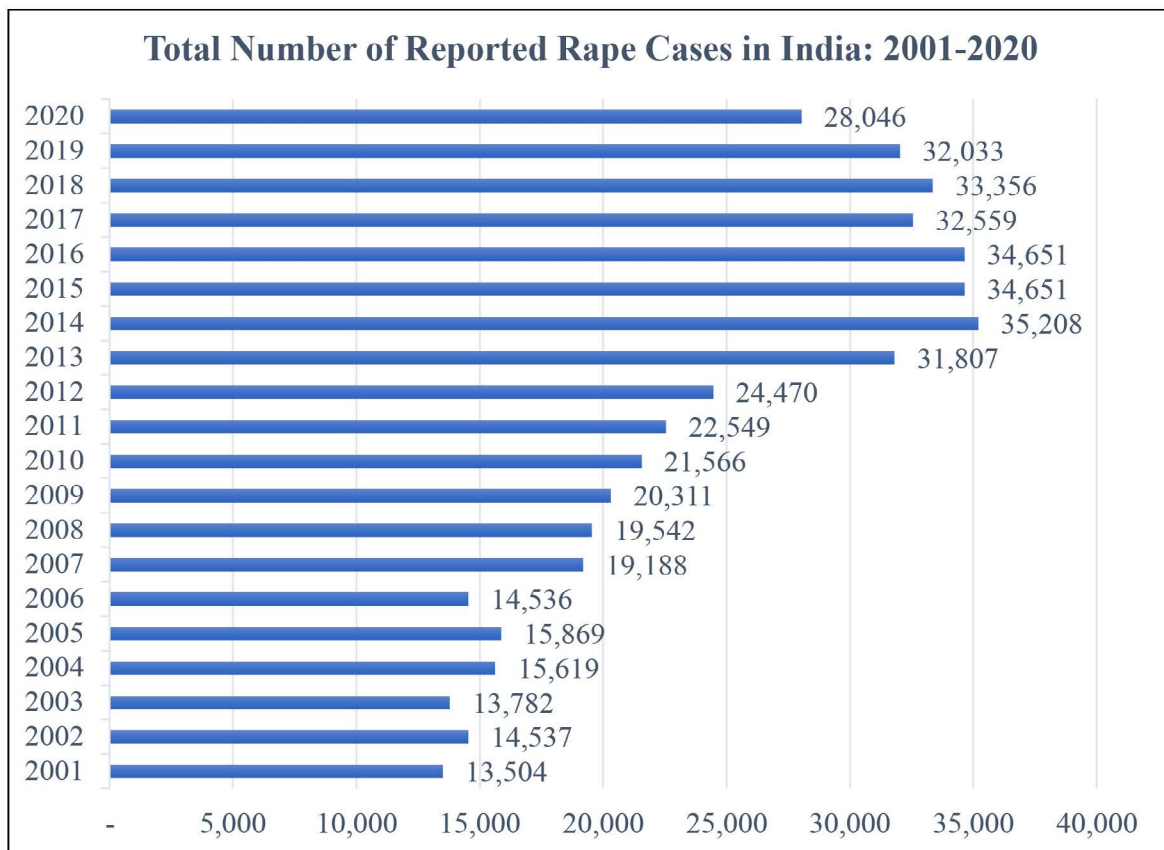
**Violence Against Women**

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) developed and adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), among which two goals explicitly focus on social equity and justice. In particular, Goal 5 calls for gender equality, with the aim of empowering women and girls by ending all forms of violence and discrimination by 2030, while Goal 10 broadly focuses on reducing inequities among the most vulnerable populations, including women, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, children, and older people (UN 2021). Progress on both of these goals is assessed here using data

that track the number of violent crimes against women and against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The number of reported rape cases escalated in 2014 (coinciding with the election of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government), with an 11% jump from 2013 to 2014. The number has been rising ever since, though there was a decrease in 2020. Figure 1 shows a graph depicting the total number of rape cases reported across all states in India from 2001 to 2020. Many political leaders across states have responded to the rise in the number of rape cases by curtailing the autonomy of women. Shivraj Chouhan, the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, a large state in Central India with a strong BJP majority, suggested that women register with the local police every time they choose to step out of their homes. Additionally, Yogi Adityanath (a Hindu monk), chief minister of the largest and most populous state in India, Uttar Pradesh, and that with the highest rates of violence against women, ordered the creation of Anti-

**Figure 1. Total number of reported rape cases in India: 2001–2020.**



Data sources: <https://data.gov.in/> and the National Crime Records Bureau (<https://ncrb.gov.in/en/crime-india>).

Romeo squads to protect women (Krishnan 2021). These vigilante groups are made up of police officers and are notorious for harassing consenting couples and arresting Muslim men suspected of dating Hindu women.

[Heavy Content: Trigger Warning] Asifa Bano, an eight-year-old Muslim girl belonging to a nomad tribe, the Bakarwals, in the village Kathua in Jammu, went missing on January 10, 2018. Her father filed a complaint with the police, and after a week-long search, her body was found in a nearby forest. The results of the postmortem indicated that she was drugged, raped repeatedly, hit on the head twice, and strangled to death before her body was discarded in the jungle. The girl was abducted and taken to a secluded Devasthan (a place of worship for a Hindu goddess), where she was held hostage for four days before being brutally killed. With extreme pressure from the media and civil society, the custodian of the temple Sanji Ram, a retired bureaucrat and member of the right-wing Hindu fascist group Hindu Ekta Manch, along with seven other Hindu men, four of whom were police officers, were arrested (Nigam 2019). Sanji Ram, the mastermind of the plot, and two others were sentenced to life in prison, while three others were sentenced to five years in prison for their role in destroying evidence. One was a minor and tried in juvenile court, while Sanji Ram's son was acquitted on the basis of inconclusive evidence. Two of the men sentenced to five years in prison were released on bail in December 2021. The motive underlying this monstrous act was to create fear and terrorize the poor nomadic Muslim tribe in Jammu in order to drive them out of the region. The recent bail of two of the perpetrators and the support received from members of the BJP exposes the deep-rooted fascism, misogyny, toxic masculinity, and Hindu hyper-nationalism rampant in India today.

Dalit women are among the largest socially segregated groups in the world and are extremely disenfranchised based on the intersectionality of gender, caste, and class identities (Sabharwal et al. 2015). In fact, they exist outside the *varna* system of social hierarchy described earlier in the article and are relegated to the lowest of the lowest social order in Indian society. Accordingly, they continue to be subject to untouchability by the upper castes (Singh and Vashistha 2018). Dalits manually scavenge human waste with their bare hands, cremate dead bodies, and skin dead animals, and for centuries, they have experienced oppres-

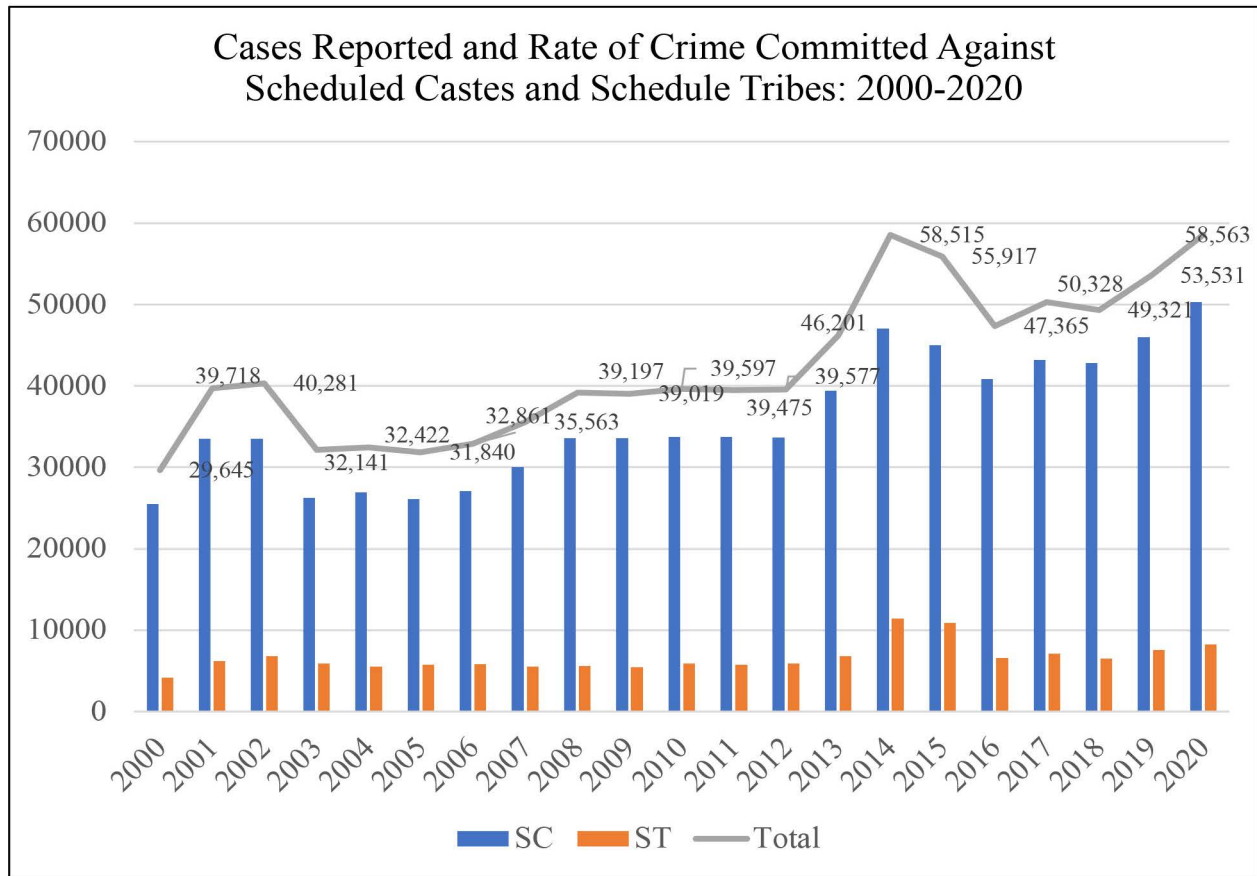
sion, exploitation, violence, and colonization from the outside invaders and the upper caste. Article 17 of the Indian Constitution abolished untouchability and provides equal rights to all citizens, while Article 15 prohibits "discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth, and Article 16 on additional grounds of descent and residence" (Mittal 1965, 424) in public employment. Despite these legal protections, caste is deeply entrenched in the social, cultural, economic, and political fabric of the nation and provides the foundation for the discrimination, harassment, and violence experienced by Dalits on an ongoing basis. The most ardent champion for the rights of Dalits was the framer of the Indian Constitution, and a Dalit himself, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who fought hard to abolish untouchability in India. On December 25, 1927,<sup>2</sup> he publicly burned the *Manu Smriti*, which he saw as a symbol of the oppression, inequality, and injustice experienced by women and Dalits.

Crime data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) indicate that crimes against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who constitute 25% of India's population, are on the rise (see Figure 2). As shown in Figure 2, there was a 21% increase in the crimes reported against the most disadvantaged groups in India from 2013 to 2014. The number continued to rise after 2014, with a decline reported in 2016, before a peak was reached in 2020. Over the past two decades, crimes against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have risen by 50%. While these data are unavailable by gender, the trends reported are concerning.

The sexual violence experienced by Dalit women is legitimized in the *Manu Smriti*, which states that "A Brahman, Kshatriya, or Vaishya Man can sexually exploit any shudra woman (Manusmitri IX.25)" (Mahey 2003, 150). According to a recent report by the NCRB (2019), approximately 10 Dalit women were raped in India every day. Such cases are countless, and most go unreported or are dropped due to the stigma, shame, and blame associated with rape. [Heavy Content: Trigger Warning] The rape and murder of a nine-year-old Dalit girl on August 3, 2021, in New Delhi is among the most recent of the heinous violent crimes against Dalit girls/women that led to several days of protests by the Dalit community across the nation. The girl was raped by a Hindu Priest (of high caste and a protector of religious values), who forcibly cremated her body despite protest by the parents

<sup>2</sup> The day is now celebrated as *Manusmriti Dahan Divas* (Crematorium for *Manusmriti*), a day of emancipation and empowerment for the Dalits and women.

**Figure 2. Cases reported and rates of crime committed against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes: 2000–2020.**



Source: National Crime Records Bureau (<https://ncrb.gov.in/en/crime-india>).

of the victim. Justification of the rape and killing of Dalit women is a form of dominance exhibited by the upper caste to maintain social order and purity (Banarjee 2016) and is part of the hegemonic Brahmanical patriarchal discourse (Pandey and Mishra 2021).

Former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was the first to compare the situation of Dalits in India to Apartheid in South Africa (Ghatak and Ugodu 2012; Khobragade 2014). While such ideologies have always existed in Indian society, they are currently being fueled by a Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) state in which several BJP ministers are perpetrators and facilitators of a Brahmanical patriarchy fraught with misogynistic belief systems that blame women for rape. One BJP member

of legislative assembly (MLA) suggested that rape can be prevented if girls are taught *sanskaar* (values and culture), while emphasizing that it is not the responsibility of the *shasan* (government) or *talwar* (sword or might) (Adhikari 2020b). Here again, we see the influence of religious texts suggesting that women are promiscuous, sly, and evil and that their bodies are objects that must be controlled (N.M. and Kuruvilla 2022).

**Honor Killing**

Violence against women is taking another ugly turn with the increase in the number of honor killings. This is taking place mostly in the north and northwestern states of India that have kangaroo courts, the Khap Panchayats,<sup>3</sup> which disallow inter-caste marriage, one

<sup>3</sup> Khap Panchayats are informal social institutions that help mediate and resolve disputes in communities or tribes and are composed of local powerful men from a high caste. While informal in nature, their decisions are binding, although they are not recognized by the Indian judicial system. They have been around since the 14th and 15th centuries as “an informal but well-established social institution in the Jat-dominated areas that fall in present-day Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh and parts of Rajasthan” (Kumar 2012, 59). For more information on the historical origins and functions of Khap Panchayats, see the works of Kumar (2012) and Singh (2014).

of the most significant reasons for honor killings in India (Dhamodharan 2020; Vishwanath and Palakonda 2011). According to Singh (2014), “Honour crimes are acts of violence, usually murder, especially committed by male family members against female family members either or, who (*sic*) are held to have brought dishonour upon the family” (28).

Honor killing is a practice most commonly found in collective and patriarchal societies that view women’s bodies as objects and a source of honor to the family/clan/community. Honor killings generally occur in response to any transgressions in the form of a pre-marital relationship, marriage outside the caste/religion, marriage within the same clan (*gotra*), relationships against the consent of the parents, adultery, or divorce. In India, honor (*izzat*) of the family/community is a burden disproportionately shouldered by women, who are usually the targets of honor killings. Khap Panchayats make most of the decisions regarding women’s clothing and freedoms. For example, they have passed diktats banning women from wearing jeans and carrying cellphones in villages in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan as jeans

and cellphones are seen as Western objects at the root of destroying the sanctity of Indian culture and values. [Heavy Content: Trigger Warning] In a recent case in Uttar Pradesh, a father beheaded his 17-year-old daughter when he found out she was in a relationship with a man of whom he did not approve. Such brutality in the name of honor killing is on the rise. According to the NCRB, “a total of 28 cases in 2014, 251 cases in 2015 and 77 cases in 2016 were reported with motive as Honour Killing (which includes cases registered under murder (section 302 IPC) & culpable homicide not amounting to murder (section 304 IPC) in the country” (Ministry of Home Affairs 2018). Khap Panchayats violate human rights and are against the democratic principles of equality, liberty, and dignity. A photograph of a Khap Panchayat is shown in Figure 3.

Honor killings violate the UN’s 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and go against the UN SDGs set for 2030. Various reports have tracked the progress regarding the status of women based on the UN’s SDGs. India ranks 148th out of 170 countries on the global Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)

**Figure 3. A Khap Panchayat (informal judicial making body), a symbol of patriarchy in India.**



Index, which measures the status of women’s empowerment globally (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security 2021). Additionally, the UN Development Program placed India 131st out of 189 countries on the 2019 Gender Inequality Index (GII), which ranks countries based on three key measures regarding women: reproductive health, empowerment, and labor force participation. Over the past decade, India has slipped eight spots on the GII (Human Development Reports 2020).

One of the key measures of socioeconomic well-being and a nation’s success is women’s participation in the labor force. Despite the tremendous growth in India’s gross domestic product (GDP) over the last few decades, it has not been associated with an increase in the labor force participation rate<sup>4</sup> among women (Lahoti and Swaminathan

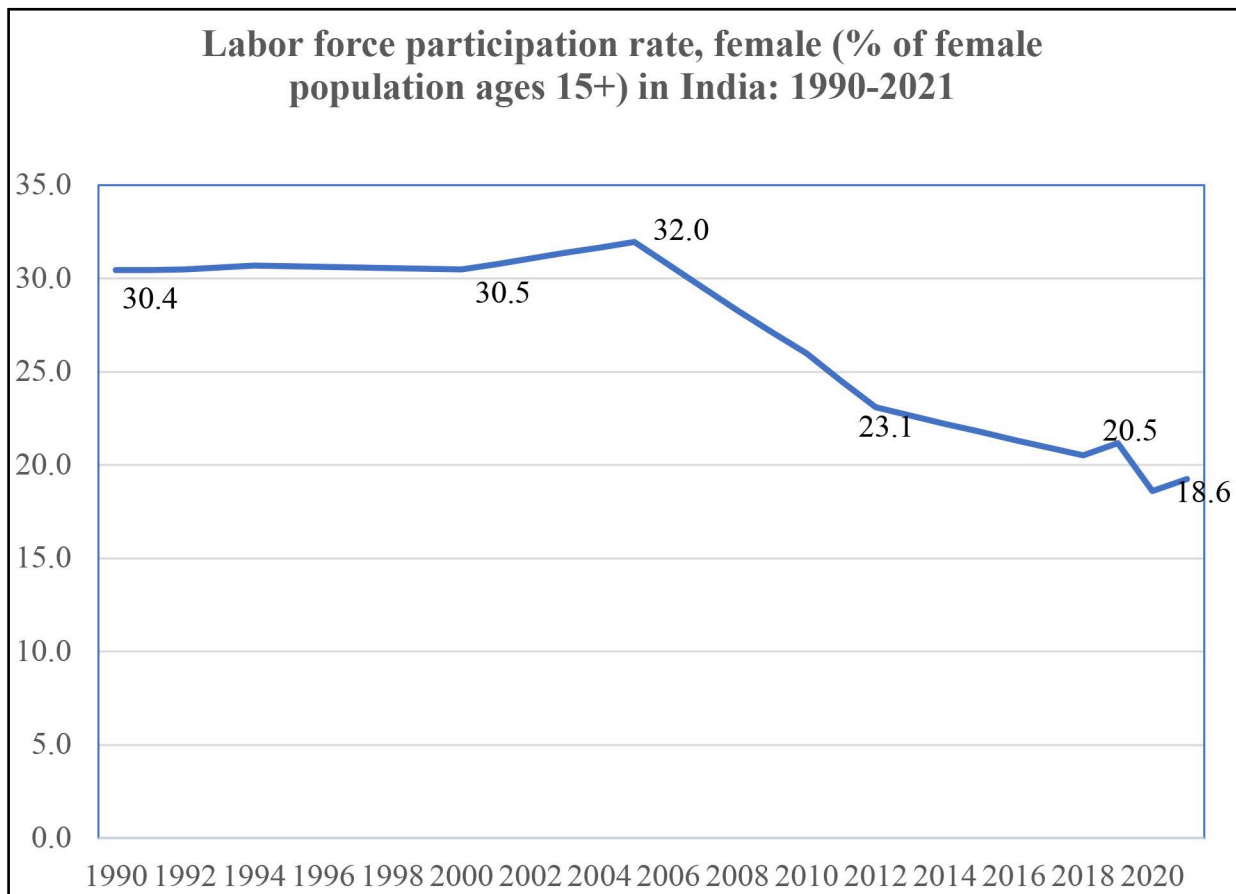
2016; Mehrotra and Parida 2017). While more than a dozen national schemes have been initiated by the BJP government to empower women, they have not helped reduce violence against women or increase their labor force participation, which, in 2020, was at its lowest rate since 1990 at 18.6% (see Figure 4). Several of these women-oriented welfare schemes also perpetuate and reinforce preexisting gender and caste norms in the society, further restricting them to domestic activities (Patnaik and Jha 2020).

### Lack of Religious Freedom for Women

#### Freedom of Choice

Interfaith marriages between a Hindu woman and a Muslim man have become targets of a Hindu national-

**Figure 4. Labor force participation rate of women (% of female population ages 15+) in India: 1990–2021.**



Source: World Bank Data (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=IN>)

<sup>4</sup> The labor force participation rate is calculated as the labor force divided by the total working-age population. The working-age population is defined as including people aged 15 to 64 (OECD, <https://data.oecd.org/emp/labour-force-participation-rate.htm>).

ist political movement called “Love jihad,” a conspiracy theory that alleges that Muslim men are coercing Hindu women into marriage and forcibly converting them to Islam (Tyagi and Sen 2020). This has triggered the passage of anti-conversion laws in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa that ban religious conversion for the purposes of marriage (Torri 2020). Marriage between a Muslim man and a Hindu woman is under strict scrutiny under Modi’s Hindutva regime and is in many cases being stopped at the altar (Torri 2020). While a marriage between a Hindu man and a Muslim woman is seen as a union of love, the reverse is considered a crime.

### ***The Case of Love Jihad: Shafin Jahan vs. Asokan K.M. and Ors.***

[Heavy Content: Trigger Warning] In 2018, the Supreme Court of India upheld the religious freedom, liberty, and autonomy of a young woman named Hadiya in the southern state of Kerala. Born to Hindu parents, Akhila Ashokan (a name given by her parents) chose to convert to Islam and was married to Shafin Jahan, a Muslim man, of her own free will. It should be noted that her decision to follow a religion of her choice preceded her marriage and was not a result of her wedding to Shafin. The parents of the girl filed a lawsuit with the Kerala High Court stating that their 24-year-old daughter was brainwashed and coerced into marriage—a case of Love jihad (Tyagi and Sen 2020). Her father alleged that Hadiya’s husband had ties with Islamic extremist groups and had plans to use her as a human bomb in Syria. While these allegations were baseless, the court annulled the marriage performed in accordance with Islamic traditions as a “sham.” Hadiya was forced to separate from her husband and ordered to live with her parents, who attained legal guardianship over her on the pretext that she was incapable of acting on her own behalf and making informed decisions despite being an adult. She was not allowed to meet with anyone or go to college, where she was studying to be a homeopathic doctor. The case was taken before the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court, which under Article 25 ruled that “all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion” (Kalidasan 2021, 55). Additionally, the right to marry a per-

son of one’s choice is guaranteed under Articles 19 and 21 and is an integral part of an individual’s “core zone of privacy.” In this case, the Supreme Court upheld the right of a woman to marry a person of her choice as well as the right to practice a religion of one’s choosing, viewing it as a case of love and not jihad.

The current wave of Hindutva has politicized religion, and the rights of women and minorities are under constant attack. Krishnan (2021) argues that the right of a woman to choose who she wants to marry is a fundamental human right and that the denial of this right is a violation against a woman’s autonomy and “the least acknowledged form of gender-based violence in India” (20). This kind of thinking and protectionist ideology goes back to the *Mânava-Dhârmasâstra*, in which women were not provided any independence and were always under the watchful eye of a male figure. Religious freedom and secularism are backsliding in India, and Hindutva is becoming the unifying force against marginalized groups, especially Muslims, Christians, and Dalit women.

### ***The Ban of the Hijab***

The fundamental right to practice one’s religion is currently being challenged across states in India that are banning the hijab for women in educational institutions (Santhosh and Paleri 2021). Since 2014, violence and hate crimes against Muslim women have been on the rise, with the hijab at the center of the debate. In the southern state of Karnataka, Muslim girls are banned from wearing a hijab in educational institutions. A three-judge bench in Karnataka upheld a ban in March of 2022 stating that the hijab is not “essential” to the practice of Islam and violates the uniform dress code (Mateen 2022). The case was brought before the court by a group of Muslim girls from a government college in Udupi, Karnataka, who were barred from entering their classrooms in hijabs. The ruling is now being challenged in the Supreme Court. The fear is that the Karnataka state verdict will further the wave of Islamophobia around the country, with several states seeing similar bans.

India is home to 200 million Muslims constituting 13% of the population in a majority Hindu nation (81%). Religious minorities are increasingly feeling threatened under the Modi government due to movements and acts like Love jihad, the ban on the hijab, the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2020,<sup>5</sup> rising commu-

<sup>5</sup> The Citizenship Amendment Act of 2020 fast-tracks citizenship for non-Muslim persecuted minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, and is discriminatory in nature as it excludes Muslims and Jews and only includes persecuted migrants that are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians (Ratha 2021).



**Figure 5. Visual representations of a ghoonghat worn by a Hindu woman on the left and a hijab worn by a Muslim woman on the right.**



nal violence, and hate speech by Hindu religious leaders and politicians. Several journalists and activists are currently serving jail time on the charges of sedition and freedom of speech is heavily curtailed, which forms the basis of a thriving democracy. India has slipped eight points to its lowest ever ranking of 150 out of 180 countries on Reporter’s Without Borders, World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders 2022). These all represent attempts to discriminate against Muslims and erase their voices through exclusionary politics and ideologies (Ochab 2022). In an in-depth ethnographic study of hijabi women, Rumaney and Sriram (2021) found that the veil is seen as a symbol of modesty, empowerment, self-efficacy, and resistance against the rising anti-Muslim rhetoric in India.

According to a survey undertaken by Pew Research Center, approximately 60% of Hindu women say they cover their heads in public compared to 89% of Muslim women (Salazar and Sahgal 2022). If courts decide to ban the hijab, they should also ban the ghoonghat, a form of *purdah* (veil) worn by many married Hindu women in the north and west regions of India. Figure 5 shows an image of a ghoonghat worn by a Hindu woman (on the left) next to that of a hijab worn by a Muslim woman (on the right). There are striking similarities between the two, with both women covering their heads and most of their faces (except their eyes). While a Hindu woman’s ghoonghat is seen as an artifact of her honor, a Muslim woman’s hijab is seen as

a symbol of terrorism. Thus, it should be asked why we do not feel threatened seeing a Hindu woman in a ghoonghat, while we feel fear seeing a Muslim woman wearing a hijab. The establishment of uniform clothing standards and practices in educational institutions can infringe on the religious freedoms of individuals and is a violation of India’s secularism.

**Causes of Gender Inequities in India (Blaming the Inequities)**

While the preceding section discussed the problems regarding gender inequities in India, this section discusses some of the key reasons for these widespread inequities (Gooden’s second step in her social equity framework). Gooden (2020) points out the nervousness among governments globally to address issues of inequities, asserting that “Nervous areas of government are commonly described as uncomfortable, difficult, challenging, or sensitive” (1). For a nation to thrive, it is vital for governments to face and address these uncomfortable issues head-on. In the context of India, caste, class, gender, and religion are these uncomfortable issues and are the root cause of most of the increasing inequities in a BJP-led government with a Hindutva agenda (Banerjee 2016; Gopinath 2020; Kaul 2021). Hindutva is not only a cultural phenomenon but also inextricably intertwined with the political, social, and economic aspects of India.

***Brahmanical Patriarchy***

Hindutva is rooted in Brahmanical philosophy, which aims to maintain a social dominance based on gender and caste hierarchy, with women seen as objects to be controlled and punished. In the Brahmanical texts, women are viewed as being at the heart of maintaining the caste hierarchy and are thus prevented from marrying men from lower castes (Chakravarti 1993). The path to salvation was codified in the religious texts that laid out the principles of *pativrata*, according to which a wife's moral duty is to serve her husband and maintain the social order by marrying within the caste. Women not only internalized but also accepted and perpetuated these ideologies rooted in religion, morality, and ethics regarding right and wrong. The justification of violence against women is thus entrenched in the Brahmanical patriarchy, a system in which the "purity of women ensured the purity of caste and thus of the social order itself" (Chakravarti 1993, 585). The need to maintain Hindu supremacy has led to acts of violence against Muslim women, women of lower caste, and women not conforming to the misogynistic and hegemonic norms of the society. Banerjee (2016) rightly notes:

Patriarchal moral high ground rooted in casteist Hinduism is advanced to punish women, sometimes through the very communities they belong to. Examples are supplied by caste (khap) panchayats' crucial role in organising communal sexual violence against "erring" women. The irony lies in the fact that this violence is practised by men who often preach, both nationally and internationally, the goddess-like stature of women in Indian (read "Hindu") culture. (7)

In India, women are elevated to the stature of goddesses as a way of promoting misogynistic values according to which women are expected never to err; to be homemakers; and to be the epitome of sacrifice, purity, and chastity. The danger of idolizing women in such a manner is the unrealistic expectations it places on them in society; when these expectations are unmet, the men in the society take it upon themselves to punish them. On the one hand, the birth of a son is celebrated, while

on the other, the birth of a daughter is seen as a liability since the parents have to provide money in the form of a dowry for her wedding (Clark 2000; Diamond-Smith, Luke, and McGarvey 2008). The preference for a son has led to a skewed gender ratio in India—110 males to 100 females (Ritchie and Roser 2019). Despite the 1994 Prohibition of Sex Selection Act, which banned prenatal sex screening in India, 500,000 female fetuses are selectively aborted each year (Jha et al. 2016; Robitaille 2020). The preference for a son is rooted in religious texts as well as economic and cultural factors prevalent in the society (Arora et al. 2013). Sons are seen as the inheritors of property and caretakers of parents in their old age (Clark 2000; Mitra 2014). Chapter 9, verse 185 of the *Manu Smriti* states that "The sons inherit the father's estate—not the brothers, not the fathers" (Olivelle and Olivelle 2005, 199). The insatiable appetite for a son results in intimate partner violence, currently forming a public health crisis that requires attention (Sabarwal et al. 2012).

These hegemonic ideas are preserved via the institution of marriage, and India is among the 36 countries in the world that do not recognize marital rape as a crime<sup>6</sup> (India Today 2016). Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) reads: "Sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape" (Exception 2, Section 375, IPC) (India Code nd). While the number of rape cases reported annually in the United States is 10 times greater than that in India (Statista 2021), the numbers are skewed since less than 1% rapes in India are reported (Raj and McDougal 2014). Furthermore, reports have indicated that one in three women in India have experienced some form of sexual coercion or violence (see Deosthali, Rege, and Arora 2022). The court is split on the issue of criminalizing marital rape; in May 2022, a two-judge bench of the Delhi High Court issued a split decision on the problem. The case will be appealed in the Supreme Court and does not have support from religious and political institutions, who fear that making marital rape a crime will be used as a weapon by women to harass men and destabilize the institution of marriage (*BBC News* 2022). Such ideas are ingrained in the patriarchal norms and the *pativrata*

<sup>6</sup> The Supreme Court in India legalized abortion for all women up to 24 weeks which may be a result of marital rape, but it has still not made marital rape a crime (Indian Express, September 29, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/medical-termination-pregnancy-act-supreme-court-quotes-abortion-rights-8179908/>).

*dharma* prescribed in the Hindu religious texts. Over centuries, such beliefs have created a culture of silence “propagated to save and respect the ‘honour,’ the ‘pride’ and the ‘values’ of the Indian family overlooking the fact that incest, violence, suicides, murders (*sic*) are the price women pay” (Nigam 2015, 1).

***Patriarchal Authoritarianism***

The Brahmanical patriarchy described in the previous section is reinforced by the current Hindutva politics of the BJP authoritarian state, in which the rights of women are subordinate to those of men. Additionally, a marketized version of Hindutva is currently gaining momentum. It is a combination of populist strategies and economic policies according to which the people are viewed as “virtuous market citizens who are regulated and disciplined through the moral frameworks of Hindu nationalism” (Chacko 2020, 2). Within this framework, gender is the underbelly through which masculine patriarchy is advanced by “turning women into market actors and making households responsible for accumulation and social reproduction. Yet, virtuous market citizenship also reproduces patriarchal Hindu nationalist gender stereotypes of women as suffering and sacrificing wives, mothers, and daughters” (Chacko 2020, 16). In the 2014 general elections in India, the front-runner of the BJP party and the current prime minister Narendra Modi used hypermasculinity, machoism, and the notion of being the protector of the nation and savior of women as the manifesto for his election. This patriarchal image resonated with both male and female voters, and the gender gap was remarkably reduced in the 2014 election, with the voter turnout being 67% for men and 66% for women (Chacko 2020; Deshpande 2014). In fact, in the 2019 general elections, women slightly outpaced men at 67.18% compared to 67.01% (Jain 2021).

The protectionist agenda of the BJP government aims to control the bodies of women by organizing Love jihad, creating Anti-Romeo squads, and promoting violence against women (through Khap Panchayats). Such ideologies actually disempower both men and women and especially impact the most marginalized sections of the society—women, Dalit women, and religious minorities. Empowerment under the guise of a protectionist agenda or “Hindutva-based moral regulation” (Banarjee 2016, 5) stifles women, increases their dependence on men, curbs their autonomy, restricts their mo-

bility, and prevents them from making decisions that impact their lives, including taking on employment. Low levels of labor force participation despite the various welfare schemes can be attributed to the low levels of education among rural women, the crowding out of women in the agricultural sector, reduced access to training facilities, poverty, malnutrition, sexual harassment, expectations regarding the dual responsibility of work and home, and the prevailing social norms and negative stereotypes toward women (Chacko 2020; Chatterjee and Sircar 2021).

**The Future of Women in India: The Way Forward (Claiming the Inequities)**

With the election of a populist government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, a wave of Hindu nationalism has returned (Kaul 2017), in which a polity that does not fall within the Hindutva ideology is othered and subject to oppressive tactics “that rely on imaginations of the ‘pure’ people and their birthright to the nation-state’s infrastructure from those undeserving others” (Kinnvall 2019, 293). The use of victimization-based propaganda that invokes fear in the minds of the majority group being replaced by minorities is a theme that cuts across authoritarian populism around the globe. The dangerous rise of right-wing nationalism is deepening the divide between majority and minority groups in many democracies, which are now backsliding due to their push for a monolithic national identity. During his four-year presidency, U.S. President Donald Trump fostered deep hostility toward immigrants and nonwhite racial minority groups. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Mihály Orbán is using similar tactics to further Islamophobia and ban homosexuality from school education. Similarly, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has made outrageous comments about women and the LGBTQ+ community, with the toxic hegemonic masculinity he exhibits having resulted in a rise in abuse and gender violence in the country. Authoritarian nationalism is a threat to democracy and its ideals, which rest upon freedom, justice, respect for human rights, and equality and equity for all (including women, minorities, Dalits, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and individuals with nonconforming gender and sexual identities).

This study used the social equity framework developed by Gooden (2014) to understand gender inequities in India under the current nationalist BJP government.

Women in India face several prejudices steeped in the culture, structure, and history of the nation. Structurally, the systemic discrimination faced by women is the result of several factors, including a 162-year-old legal system with deep colonial roots that needs a reexamination in changing times. Furthermore, a reform in the criminal justice system, which tends to favor the Hindu majoritarian government while being discriminatory to religious minorities, requires a deeper examination. While the IPC has been amended multiple times, marital rape needs to be criminalized, and sedition laws need to be reformed. Take, for instance, the case of the hijab, which is banned in educational institutions in Karnataka; this is a violation of the religious freedoms of a minority group that is seen as a threat to the Hindu nation. Systematically excluding Muslim women from the education system can lead to disparities with both short- and long-term impacts on the economic, social, cultural, and political well-being and inclusion of these citizens.

Gender inequities in India cannot be studied in isolation and, as highlighted in this study, must be analyzed using the intersectional lens of caste, religion, and class. Caste structures have deep and widespread roots in Indian society. Unfortunately, the most marginalized groups are subject to severe brutality—they are viewed as less than human and experience the grossest forms of atrocity. Dalit women are “demeaned and degraded and their body is a free terrain of colonization by men from other communities” (Singh and Vashistha 2018, 337). They are also excluded from the educational, political, economic, and social structures of the society; live in abject poverty; and are sexually harassed and exploited on a daily basis. Additionally, Dalit women face the same patriarchal oppression from Dalit men as they do from upper-caste men. Thus, a Dalit-feminist framework must be adopted to understand the unique characteristics of Dalit women and advance feminist theory (Arya 2020).

While many might argue that caste does not exist in modern day India, they are caste blind<sup>7</sup> and speak from a place of privilege and based on a utopian notion according to which populist philosophy silences any discourse on the inequities that exist in the society (Silva 2020). Just as colorblindness perpetuates inequities in

race (Bonilla-Silva 2006), caste blindness maintains an upper-caste Hindu privilege that prevents majority groups from understanding and acknowledging their own privilege and their role in producing, reproducing, and preserving the dominant social order. Future studies can adopt a comparativist approach to record the experiences of the most marginalized groups around the globe. While it is not easy to compare inequities across nations given their historical, cultural, political, and social differences, certain patterns are beginning to emerge, as identified in this study.

In December 1979, the UN adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). India ratified the convention in 1993 and hailed this act as the beginning of addressing gender inequities in the nation. While compliance with the CEDAW is voluntary, courts have used the treaty guidelines in high-profile gender equity and religious freedom cases (Holmes 2019). Gender inequity is a matter of human right, and “if women’s human rights are to become part of people’s lives, they must cross the bridge from being ‘rights’ in law books to ‘rights’ guaranteed by the everyday practices of local communities: they must shift from *adhikar* to *huq*”<sup>8</sup> (Rajaram and Zararia 2009, 465). Thus, the use of a rights-based approach is crucial to addressing the gross inequities that women, Dalits, and religious minorities experience in India. Moving the most marginalized and disenfranchised populations in India from the fringes to the center of policymaking can help reframe the decision-making process.

Social equity, as a third pillar of public administration, is often subordinate to the values of efficiency and effectiveness (Berry-James et al. 2021; Blessett et al. 2019). However, I would argue that when focus is given to equitable policymaking, the natural outcome will be effective policies that are inclusive and efficient. McCandless and Blessett (2022) argue the following:

The field of public administration has long resisted admitting an uncomfortable truth. Public administration is culpable in creating and maintaining racist, white supremacist policies and institutions through

<sup>7</sup> According to Silva (2020), “Caste blindness’ can be defined as a deliberate neglect of caste discrimination in public policy; such policies being driven by the privileged layer of society who do not recognise or deliberately disregard caste discrimination simply because they benefit from and identify with hereditary privileges generated by the system” (52).

<sup>8</sup> *Adhikar* refers to entitlement, and *huq* refers to rights.

which Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color disproportionately experience prejudice and discrimination and, therefore, inequities and injustices throughout public services and society. (91)

I offer a similar argument regarding the case of India, where public leaders have for too long maintained misogynistic and casteist ideologies centered around Brahmanical and heteronormative values, systematically leaving women at the intersection of caste and religion out of the realm of policies and policymaking. These groups have for centuries experienced erasure in the form of extreme oppression; violence; and exclusion from economic, social, cultural, and political institutions.

I compare the Hindutva ideology to that of the right-wing white supremacists in the United States who fear that the influx of immigrants, minorities, and people of color will diminish the white race—thus justifying the killing of and violence against Black and marginalized members of the society. When a social order is threatened, whether it be of the majority Hindus in India, the majority whites in the United States, the Nazis in Germany, or the Kremlin in Russia, the majority adopts violence and hate targeted against women, ethnic, and religious minority groups. Thus, lynching, rape, and even killing (honor killing) may be viewed as justified so as to maintain dominance by certain groups of society who feel threatened by minority groups.

## Conclusion

While much has been written on the authoritarian values of the West, there is a dearth of literature in public administration that exposes the state of women in India from a social equity and intersectional lens. This study is thus a step in that direction and a reminder to the broader public administration community that inequities are persistent around the world and that it is our responsibility as global citizens to further the discourse by centering the voices of the most marginalized and oppressed members of society. The inception of the *Journal of Social Equity in Public Administration* (JSEPA) is another step in that direction. It will fill a gaping hole that currently exists in the mainstream public administration literature discourse and provide a platform for scholars and practitioners to address social inequities that exist both locally and globally.

## References

- Adhikari, Shukra Raj. 2020a. "Manu Smriti as the Protection of Female in Hindu Philosophy: In the Dimension of Structural-Functionalism." *Philosophy Study* 10 (11): 706–712.
- Adhikari, Somak. 2020b. "Rape Cases Can Be Stopped Only with Sanskar Not Governance'—UP MLA Makes Bizarre Statement." *India Times*. October 4, 2020. Accessed May 14, 2022. <https://www.india-times.com/news/india/up-bjp-mla-makes-bizarre-statement-524369.html>
- Arora, Anjali, Anshu Mittal, Deepak Pathania, Jagjeet Singh, Chandan Mehta, and Ruhi Bunger. 2013. "Impact of Health Education on Knowledge and Practices About Menstruation Among Adolescent Schoolgirls of Rural Part of District Ambala, Haryana." *Indian Journal of Community Health* 25 (4): 492–497.
- Arya, Sunaina. 2020. "Dalit or Brahmanical Patriarchy? Rethinking Indian Feminism." *CASTE/A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* 1 (1): 217–228.
- Banerjee, Prathama. 2016. "Writing the Adivasi: Some Historiographical Notes." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 53 (1): 131–153.
- Bansode, Rupali. 2021. "Including Caste and Caste-Based Sexual Violence in Teaching." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 43(2): 142–64.
- BBC News. 2022. "Marital Rape: Delhi High Court Gives Split Verdict," May 11, 2022, sec. India. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-60489320>
- Berry-James, Rajade M., Brandi Blessett, Rachel Emas, Sean McCandless, Ashley E. Nickels, Kristen Norman-Major, and Parisa Vinzant. 2021. "Stepping Up To The Plate: Making Social Equity A Priority In Public Administration's Troubled Times." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 27 (1): 5–15.
- Blessett, Brandi, Jennifer Dodge, Beverly Edmond, Holly T. Goerdel, Susan T. Gooden, Andrea M. Headley, Norma M. Riccucci, and Brian N. Williams. 2019. "Social Equity in Public Administration: A Call to Action." *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance* 2 (4): 283–299.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2006. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bose, Mandakranta. 2010. *Women in the Hindu Tradition: Rules, Roles and Exceptions*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Chacko, Priya. 2018. "The Right Turn in India: Authoritarianism, Populism and Nonlinearization." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48 (4): 541–565.

- Chacko, Priya. 2020. "Gender and Authoritarian Populism: Empowerment, Protection, and the Politics of Resentful Aspiration in India." *Critical Asian Studies* 52 (2): 204–225.
- Chakravarti, Uma. 1993. "Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State." *Economic and Political Weekly* 28 (14): 579–585.
- Chatterjee, Deepaboli, and Neelanjan Sircar. 2021. "Why Is Female Labour Force Participation So Low in India?" *Urbanisation* 6 (1\_suppl): S40–S57.
- Clark, Shelley. 2000. "Son Preference and Sex Composition of Children: Evidence from India." *Demography* 37 (1): 95–108.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140: 139–168.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241–1299.
- Datta, Amrita, and Shivani Satija. 2020. "Women, Development, Caste, and Violence in Rural Bihar, India." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 26 (2): 223–244.
- Deshpande, Ashwini. 2002. "Assets Versus Autonomy? The Changing Face of the Gender-Caste Overlap in India." *Feminist Economics* 8 (2): 19–35.
- Deshpande, Ashwini. 2007. "Overlapping Identities Under Liberalization: Gender and Caste in India." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 55 (4): 735–760.
- Deshpande, Rajeshwari. 2014. "Women's Vote in 2014." *The Hindu*, June 25, 2014, sec. Comment. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/womens-vote-in-2014/article6151723.ece>
- Deosthali, Padma-Bhate, Sangeeta Rege, and Sanjida Aroora. 2022. "Women's Experiences of Marital Rape and Sexual Violence Within Marriage in India: Evidence from Service Records." *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* 29 (2): 2048455.
- Dhamodharan, M. 2020. "Honor Killing: Social, Psychological and Cultural Perspectives." In *Delivering Justice*, ed. Sibnath Deb and G. Subhalakshmi, (pp. 53–64). Routledge India.
- Diamond-Smith, Nadia, Nancy Luke, and Stephen McGarvey. 2008. "'Too Many Girls, Too Much Dowry': Son Preference and Daughter Aversion in Rural Tamil Nadu, India." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 10 (7): 697–708.
- Evans, Jonathan, Neha Sahgal, Ariana Monique Salazar, Kelsey Jo Starr, and Manolo Corichi. 2022 (March 2). "How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. Pew Research Center, Accessed April 14, 2022 <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/03/02/how-indians-view-gender-roles-in-families-and-society/>
- Elst, Koenraad. 2008. "Manu as a Weapon Against Egalitarianism: Nietzsche and Hindu Political Philosophy." In *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought*, ed. Vasti Roodt & Herman Siemmens, (p. 543). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and Peace Research Institute Oslo. 2021. *Women, Peace, and Security Index 2021/22: Tracking Sustainable Peace Through Inclusion, Justice, and Security for Women*. Washington, DC: GIWPS and PRIO.
- Ghatak, Sambuddha, and E. Ike Udogu. 2012. "Human Rights Issues of Minorities in Contemporary India: A Concise Analysis." *Journal of Third World Studies* 29 (1): 203–230.
- Gopinath, Gayatri. 2020. "Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion." In *Uprootings/Re-groundings Questions of Home and Migration*, edited by Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, Mimi Sheller. pp. 137–56. London: Routledge.
- Gooden, Susan T. (ed.). 2020. *Global Equity in Administration: Nervous Areas of Governments*. New York: Routledge.
- Gooden, Susan T. 2014. *Race and Social Equity: A Nervous Area of Government*. New York: Routledge.
- Gupta, Sangeeta R. 1994. "The Ambiguity of the Historical Position of Hindu Women in India: Sita, Draupadi and the Laws of Manu." *UCLA Historical Journal* 14. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9wd7z439>
- Holmes, Rebecca. 2019. *Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Shock-Sensitive Social Protection*. Overseas Development Institute.
- Human Development Reports. 2020. Accessed May 22, 2022. <https://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/68606>
- India Code. Nd. Section 375. Rape. [https://www.indiacode.nic.in/show-data?actid=AC\\_CEN\\_5\\_23\\_00037\\_186045\\_1523266765688&orderno=424](https://www.indiacode.nic.in/show-data?actid=AC_CEN_5_23_00037_186045_1523266765688&orderno=424)
- India Today. 2016. "Marital Rape in India: 36 Countries Where Marital Rape Is Not a Crime." Accessed May 21, 2022. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/storymarital-rape-312955-2016-03-12>
- Jain, Bharti. 2021. "Women Voter Participation Exceeds that of Men in 2019 LS Polls: CEC Chandra." *The Times of India*. Accessed May 16, 2022. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/women-voter-participation-exceeds-that-of-men-in-2019-ls-polls-cec-chandra/articleshow/87936542.cms>
- Jaishankar, K., and Debarati Halder. 2019. "A Critical Appraisal of the Ancient Indian Hindu Code." *Routledge Handbook of South Asian Criminology*. London: Routledge.

- Kalidasan, Adhvaidha. 2021. "The Hadiya Case: Human Rights Violations and State Islamophobic Propaganda in India." *Journal of Cultural Studies* 6 (SI): 49–60.
- Kaul, Nitasha. 2017. "Rise of the Political Right in India: Hindutva-Development Mix, Modi Myth, and Dualities." *Journal of Labor and Society* 20 (4): 523–548.
- Kaul, Nitasha. 2021. "The Misogyny of Authoritarians in Contemporary Democracies." *International Studies Review* 23 (4): 1619–1645.
- Khobragade, Vinod F. 2014. "Human Security and Dalits." *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 18 (2): 46–63.
- Kinnvall, Catarina. 2019. "Populism, Ontological Insecurity and Hindutva: Modi and the Masculinization of Indian Politics." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32 (3): 283–302.
- Krishnan, Kavita. 2021 (March 12). "India: Women Reject State Control." *Green Left Weekly* Issue 1300, India.
- Kumar, Ajay. 2012 (January 28). "Khap Panchayats: A Socio-Historical Overview." *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (4): 59–64.
- Kumar, Ajay. 2021. "Sexual Violence against Dalit Women: An Analytical Study of Intersectionality of Gender, Caste, and Class in India." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 22 (10): 123–134.
- Lahoti, Rahul, and Hema Swaminathan. 2016. "Economic Development and Women's Labor Force Participation in India." *Feminist Economics* 22 (2): 168–195.
- Mahey, Sonia. 2003. "The Status of Dalit Women in India's Caste-Based System." In *Culture and the State: Alternative Interventions, Critical Works from the Proceedings of the 2003 Conference at the University of Alberta*, pp. 149–154. Alberta, Canada.
- Mateen, Zoya. 2022. "Karnataka Bandh: Should Courts Decide If Hijab Is Essential in Islam?" March 16, 2022, sec. India. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-60748012>
- McCandless, Sean, and Brandi Blessett. 2022. "Dismantling Racism and White Supremacy in Public Service Institutions and Society: Contextualizing the Discussion and Introducing the Symposium." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 44 (2): 91–104.
- Mehrotra, Santosh, and Jajati K. Parida. 2017. "Why Is the Labour Force Participation of Women Declining in India?" *World Development* 98: 360–380.
- Ministry of Home Affairs. 2018. Honor Killings. <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2018-pdfs/ls-31072018-English/2106.pdf>
- Mitra, Aparna. 2014. "Son Preference in India: Implications for Gender Development." *Journal of Economic Issues* 48 (4): 1021–1037.
- Mittal, J. K. 1965. "Right to Equality and the Indian Supreme Court." *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 14 (3): 422–458.
- National Crime Records Bureau. Crime in India. 2019. <https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/CII%202019%20Volume%202.pdf>
- National Crime Records Bureau. Crime in India. 2020. <https://ncrb.gov.in/en/crime-india>
- Nigam, Shalu. 2015. "The Social and Legal Paradox Relating to Marital Rape in India: Addressing Structural Inequalities." Available at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2613447](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2613447)
- Nigam, Shalu. 2019. "A Year After Brutal Gang Rape and Murder in Kathua: Apathetic State Agenda, Regressive Policies and Escalating Violence Continued." Available at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3328353](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3328353)
- N.M., Naseera, and Moly Kuruvilla. 2022. "The Sexual Politics of the Manusmriti: A Critical Analysis with Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Perspectives." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 23 (6): article 3.
- Ochab, Dr Ewelina U. 2022. "Calls for Atrocity Crimes Against Muslims in India." *Forbes*. Accessed May 21, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2022/02/05/calls-for-atrocity-crimes-against-muslims-in-india/?sh=16bff19f555b>
- OECD. 2019. "Employment - Labour Force Participation Rate - OECD Data." <https://data.oecd.org/empl/labour-force-participation-rate.htm>
- Olivelle, Patrick, and Suman Olivelle. 2005. *Manu's Code of Law*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Pandey, Ajit Kumar, and V. N. Mishra. 2021. "Dalit Women's Narratives on Sexual Violence: Reflections on Indian Society and State." *Social Change* 51 (3): 311–326.
- Patnaik, Sasmita, and Shaily Jha. 2020. "Caste, Class and Gender in Determining Access to Energy: A Critical Review of LPG Adoption in India." *Energy Research & Social Science* 67: 101530.
- Peters, Michael A. 2018. "The End of Neoliberal Globalisation and the Rise of Authoritarian Populism." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50 (4): 323–325.
- Raj, Anita, and Lotus McDougal. 2014. "Sexual Violence and Rape in India." *Lancet* 383 (9920): 865.
- Rajaram, N., and Vaishali Zararia. 2009. "Translating Women's Human Rights in a Globalizing World: The Spiral Process in Reducing Gender Injustice in Baroda, India." *Global Networks* 9 (4): 462–484.
- Ratha, Keshab Chandra. 2021. "Interpreting Citizenship Amendment Act: Its Content and Context." *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 67 (4): 559–572.

- Rege, Sharmila. 1996. "Caste and Gender: The Violence Against Women in India." European University Institute Working Paper RSC No. 96/17.
- Rege, Sharmila. 1998. "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position." *Economic and Political Weekly* 33 (44): WS39–WS46.
- Reporters Without Borders. 2022. "RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index: A New Era of Polarization" Accessed June 1, 2022. <https://rsf.org/en/rsfs-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation>
- Ritchie, Hannah, and Max Roser. 2019 (June). "Gender Ratio." *Our World in Data*. Gender Ratio - Our World in Data
- Robitaille, M.C., 2020. Conspicuous Daughters: Exogamy, Marriage Expenditures, and Son Preference in India. *Journal of Development Studies* 56 (3): 630–647.
- Rumaney, Haniya, and Sujata Sriram. 2021. "Not Without My Hijab: Experiences of Veiled Muslim Women in India." *Human Arenas* (2021): 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-021-00193-3>
- Santhosh, R., and Dayal Paleri. 2021. "Ethnicization of Religion in Practice? Recasting Competing Communal Mobilizations in Coastal Karnataka, South India." *Ethnicities* 21 (3): 563–588.
- Sabarwal, Shagun, Marie C. McCormick, Jay G. Silverman, and S. V. Subramanian. 2012. "Association Between Maternal Intimate Partner Violence Victimization and Childhood Immunization in India." *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics* 58 (2): 107–113.
- Sabharwal, Nidhi S, and Wandana Sonalkar. 2015. "Dalit Women in India: At the Crossroads of Gender, Class, and Caste." *Global Justice: Theory Practice Rhetoric* 8 (1): 44–73.
- Sabharwal, Nidhi S., Mala Mukherjee, Vinod K. Mishra, and Dilip Diwakar G. 2015. "Food Security for Socially Excluded Groups in India: Examining the Role of Social Protection Programme." *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies* 2 (1): 25–42.
- Salazar, Ariana Monique, and Neha Sahgal. 2022. "In India, Head Coverings Are Worn by Most Women, Including Roughly Six-In-Ten Hindus." Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/17/in-india-head-coverings-are-worn-by-most-women-including-roughly-six-in-ten-hindus/>
- Savarkar, V. D. 2000. "Women in the Manusmriti" in Savarkar Samagar (collection of Savarkar's writings in Hindi), vol. 4." New Delhi: Prabhat.
- Silva, Kalinga Tudor. 2020. "Nationalism, Caste-Blindness and the Continuing Problems of War-Displaced Panchamars in Post-War Jaffna Society." *CASTE/A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* 1 (1): 51–70.
- Singh, Anamika. 2014. "Honour Crime and Khap Involvement: Threat to Human Rights." *Deliberative Research* 24 (1): 28.
- Singh, Jayshree, and Gargi Vashistha. 2018. "A Critical Insight on Status of Dalit Women in India." *IJRAR-International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews* 5 (3): 337–342.
- Statista. 2021. "U.S.: Number of Rape/Sexual Assault Victims, by Sex 2019." <https://www.statista.com/statistics/251923/usa--reported-forcible-rape-cases-by-gender/>
- Torri, Michelguglielmo. 2020. "India 2020: The Deepening Crisis of Democracy." *Asia Maior* 31: 331–376.
- Tyagi, Aastha, and Atreyee Sen. 2020. "Love-Jihad (Muslim Sexual Seduction) and Ched-Chad (Sexual Harassment): Hindu Nationalist Discourses and the Ideal/Deviant Urban Citizen in India." *Gender, Place & Culture* 27 (1): 104–125.
- United Nations. 2015. "The 17 Sustainable Development Goals." United Nations. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Vishwanath, Jyothi, and Srinivas C. Palakonda. 2011. "Patriarchal Ideology of Honour and Honour Crimes in India." *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences* 6 (1/2): 386.
- Worldbank.org. 2019. "Labor Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Ages 15+) (Modeled ILO Estimate)—India | Data." 2019. Accessed May 18, 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=IN>

---

**Meghna Sabharwal** (mxs095000@utdallas.edu) is a professor in the public and nonprofit management program at the University of Texas at Dallas. Her research is focused on public human resources management, specifically diversity, equity and inclusion. She has published three books and over 55 peer reviewed journal articles, and is the winner of four best paper awards.