
PATRIARCHY, EDUCATION, AND EMPOWERMENT: REFRAMING ‘BETI BACHAO’ THROUGH ‘BETA PADHAO’ IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

By Monika Negi¹ & Prachi Sharma²

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between patriarchy, education, and women’s empowerment in India. Building on socio-legal scholarship, government data, and crime statistics, it reinterprets the slogan “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao” by emphasizing that educating sons (“Beta Padhao”) is a vital prerequisite for the genuine protection and advancement of daughters and daughters-in-law. The discussion engages with constitutional provisions and statutory measures—such as the PCPNDT Act, the Dowry Prohibition Act, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, and the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act—alongside key judicial decisions and entrenched social norms sustaining son preference and dowry practices. The paper argues for a comprehensive approach that combines stronger legal enforcement, gender-sensitive educational curricula, male participation initiatives, and community-based strategies to dismantle patriarchal structures. Drawing on empirical evidence, case studies, and policy analysis, it advances a holistic framework for achieving gender justice in contemporary India.

KEYWORDS: Patriarchy; Beta Padhao; Beti Bachao; Daughters-in-law; Gender Sensitization; India.

¹ The author (I) is a Professor at UILS, PUSSGRC, Hoshiarpur.

² The author (II) is a Research Scholar at Panjab University, Chandigarh.

Introduction

In India, the persistence of patriarchal systems has led to long-standing gender disparities that affect women throughout their lives. The cultural and economic value of male offspring continues to impact family decision-making and public policy results, from biassed household practices against daughters-in-law to the systemic preference for sons at birth.³ In order to improve girls' educational prospects and reverse the dropping child sex ratios, the Government of India launched the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) initiative in 2015.⁴ Although BBBP has been effective in increasing awareness, its strategy is still lacking because concentrating just on girls ignores the patriarchal attitudes that uphold inequality. In order to foster equal values for long-term societal change, boys must be educated and gender-sensitive (Beta Padhao).⁵

Thus, Beta Padhao is presented in this study as an essential addition to Beti Bachao. The argument is based on India's constitutional guarantees of equality, important court rulings supporting gender justice, and legislative frameworks like the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994; the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005; and the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005.⁶ Empirical data on sex ratios, crimes against women, and sociological research on the contributions of sons and daughters-in-law to patriarchy are all incorporated into the analysis. The continuation of gender-based violence, such as the frequency of dowry murders and recurrent gang rape occurrences, despite progressive laws, underscores the disconnect between social realities and legal conventions.⁷

Patriarchal Beliefs and Gender Disparities in India

Patriarchy in India draws its strength from kinship structures, inheritance rules, and religious traditions that prioritize male lineage (Chakravarti, 2019). Rituals such as *kanyadaan* and the practice of dowry institutionalize the notion that daughters are destined to leave their natal homes, thereby shifting both their economic value and responsibility to their marital families. This cultural logic sustains son preference, reflected in reproductive decisions and patterns of parental investment that systematically privilege boys (Agarwal, 2018).

³ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender & Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1988), p. 274.

⁴ Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme Guidelines* (2015), available at: <https://wcd.nic.in> (last accessed September 17, 2025)

⁵ Nandita Bhatla & Ravi Verma, *Changing Norms: Boys, Men and Gender Equality in India* (International Center for Research on Women, 2019).

⁶ *Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma*, (2020) 9 SCC 1; *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, (1997) 6 SCC 241.

⁷ National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), *Crime in India 2022: Statistics* (2023), available at: <https://ncrb.gov.in> (last accessed September 17, 2025).

The daughter-in-law's position serves as another example of how patriarchy is passed down through the generations. Women usually move into their husband's home after marriage, where they are expected to take up ritual, caregiving, and household duties. Their independence is restricted, and their value is frequently assessed based on how well they meet expectations in the home, especially how well they are able to produce boys and uphold family honor. Both more overt forms of control, like physical assault, and more covert ones, like mental coercion, are used to impose these demands (Mehra, 2019).

From unequal access to healthcare and nutrition to differences in educational investment, research shows that patriarchal ideals are perpetuated through routine behaviors. Over the course of a woman's life, these small-scale discriminations compound, limiting her economic mobility and bargaining power in both her birth and married households (Khan & Iyer, 2017). Therefore, addressing these disparities calls for interventions that go beyond empowering girls alone and include changing the perspectives of family members who uphold and reinforce these standards, particularly sons.

Legal Framework Protecting Women and Girls in India

The constitutional system of India offers a solid normative basis for gender equality. While Article 15 expressly forbids discrimination based on sex, Article 14 ensures equality before the law.⁸ The rights to life and personal freedom are upheld by Article 21, and Article 21A expands these protections to include education. The State is required by the Directive Principles, particularly Article 39, to ensure that men and women have equal access to income and means of subsistence.⁹ The adoption of legislative measures aimed at defending women's rights and overthrowing patriarchal structures has been guided by this constitutional perspective.¹⁰

The ways in which patriarchy manifests itself in daily life are directly addressed by several legislative initiatives. In order to combat one of the most obvious signs of son preference, the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994, criminalized sex-selective diagnostics in an effort to prevent female foeticide.¹¹ Similarly, although deeply ingrained societal customs have hindered its efficacy, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 penalizes the giving and receiving of dowries.¹² By acknowledging domestic violence in its

⁸ The Constitution of India, Article 14.

⁹ Ibid., Article 39.

¹⁰ Indira Jaising & Pinky Anand (eds.), *Law, Justice and Gender: Critical Perspectives on the Legal System in India* (Sage Publications, 2019).

¹¹ Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994.

¹² Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.

physical, emotional, and financial manifestations, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA) broadened the scope of women's rights, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, aimed to end child marriages that disproportionately impact girls.¹³

Yet, despite this progressive architecture, implementation remains deeply problematic. Social stigma, lack of awareness, procedural bottlenecks, and institutional apathy—particularly within law enforcement—continue to undermine women's access to justice. Daughters-in-law, in particular, face formidable barriers in pursuing remedies under provisions such as Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, which penalizes cruelty by husbands and in-laws.¹⁴ Many cases are informally settled to avoid social dishonour, while evidentiary challenges frustrate successful prosecution. Thus, legislative reform must be buttressed by normative transformation, including educational initiatives aimed at sons and male family members, in order to erode entrenched patriarchal attitudes.¹⁵

Educating the son (Beta Padhao) as a Strategy for Gender Equality

In order to achieve gender equality, Beta Padhao reinterprets masculine socialization as essential. Sons are not just today's kids; they are also the future fathers, spouses, employers, and community leaders whose opinions greatly influence women's prospects in life.¹⁶ It has already shown promise in changing boys' perspectives and fostering more egalitarian attitudes to incorporate gender sensitivity into community education, teacher preparation, and school curricula.¹⁷

One of the most important policy windows for mainstreaming gender education across learning stages is the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Modules that foster equality, respect, and shared home duty can be introduced because of its emphasis on value-based and comprehensive education.¹⁸ Early interventions have been shown to promote respectful interactions and break the cycle of gendered role conditioning.¹⁹ Examples of these treatments include structured mentorship programs, life-skills training, and school-based gender clubs.

¹³ *Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma*, (2020) 9 SCC 1.

¹⁴ Indian Penal Code, Section 498A.

¹⁵ Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women's Rights in India* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁶ Nandita Bhatla & Ravi Verma, *Changing Norms: Boys, Men and Gender Equality in India* (International Center for Research on Women, 2019).

¹⁷ Mary E. John, *Disrupting Patriarchy: Feminist Interventions and Debates in India* (Zubaan, 2021).

¹⁸ Ministry of Education, Government of India, *National Education Policy 2020*, available at: <https://education.gov.in> (last accessed September 17, 2025).

¹⁹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Program H: Engaging Men in Gender Equality* (2018), available at: <https://www.unfpa.org> (last accessed September 17, 2025).

As one senior officer in the Director General of Police Operations Division (DGPOD) observed: **“We cannot end violence against women by protecting daughters alone. We must also re-educate our sons; only then can the home and the street become safer spaces for women.”*²⁰ This acknowledgment underscores that male re-socialization is not peripheral but central to dismantling patriarchy.

Societal Impact of Patriarchy on Daughters and Daughters-in-Law

The societal impacts of patriarchy manifest both in quantitative indicators and lived experiences. Child sex ratio (CSR) imbalances have been well documented, particularly in regions like Punjab, Haryana, and parts of Rajasthan, where son preference has historically been strongest (Census 2011; MWCD reports). Skewed CSRs lead to long-term demographic imbalances, with downstream effects on marriage markets, trafficking risks, and social tensions.

Daughters-in-law often bear the brunt of patriarchal control through dowry harassment, domestic violence, restrictions on employment, and limited access to property. NCRB data on dowry deaths and domestic violence underscores the pervasive nature of these harms; however, underreporting and localised informal dispute resolution mean official figures likely understate true prevalence (NCRB, 2022).

The intersectionality of caste, class, and region shapes how daughters and daughters-in-law experience patriarchy. For example, in certain upper-caste agrarian communities, landholding patterns reinforce male primogeniture, whereas in urban contexts, educational aspirations may alter but not eliminate gendered expectations. Policy responses therefore must be context-sensitive and responsive to local social structures.

Case Studies and Data

Empirical evaluations of BBBP reveal mixed outcomes. Some districts reported modest improvements in sex ratio at birth and increased school enrolment for girls, while others showed negligible change. Government progress reports (MWCD, 2021) indicate the importance of sustained, district-level convergence among health, education, and welfare agencies to achieve measurable results.

²⁰ Statement by a senior officer, Director General of Police Operations Division (DGPOD), cited in Centre for Social Research (CSR), *Report on Gender Sensitisation and Policing in India* (2021).

Case studies illustrate how male engagement can transform outcomes. For instance, pilot programs that combined community dialogues with male mentorship reported shifts in attitudes towards dowry and increased support for girls' education. Conversely, evaluations indicate that awareness campaigns without structural support—such as economic incentives or strong enforcement—tend to have transient impacts.

Statistical data reinforces the need for integrated approaches. For example, districts that combined BBBP messaging with enhanced legal monitoring and community-driven gender clubs showed better improvement in CSR and school retention rates. This suggests that Beta Padhao components — education, male engagement, and legal enforcement — operate synergistically to produce durable change.

Way Forward

The way forward requires a multi-layered strategy integrating law, education, media, and community mobilisation. First, enforcement of existing statutes must be strengthened through capacity-building for police, faster judicial processes, and accessible legal aid for victims, especially daughters-in-law who may face familial pressure against reporting.

Second, education policy should institutionalize gender sensitization at all levels. The NEP 2020 should be operationalized to include mandatory modules on gender, consent, shared domestic responsibility, and critical thinking about norms. Teacher training programs must equip educators to handle sensitive issues and to facilitate constructive dialogues with boys.

Third, national and state-level campaigns should reframe messaging to highlight male responsibility — 'Beta Padhao, Beti Bachao' — positioning sons as allies in gender justice. Media partnerships, curriculum-linked programming, and positive role-modelling in films and television can challenge stereotypes and provide alternative masculinities.

Fourth, community institutions — panchayats, religious bodies, and local NGOs — should be engaged to monitor and sanction dowry practices, encourage equal inheritance practices, and support survivor networks. Cash-transfer schemes and targeted incentives for girls' education (e.g., scholarships conditioned on boys' participation in gender modules) can create enabling environments.

Finally, data systems must be improved. District-level monitoring, timely publication of sex ratio and crime statistics, and independent program evaluations will allow policymakers to scale successful interventions and recalibrate ineffective ones.

Conclusion

This paper argues that Beti Bachao must be complemented by Beta Padhao to dismantle patriarchy effectively. Legal protections are necessary but not sufficient; the attitudes of sons — as future husbands, fathers, and community leaders — are central to whether daughters and daughters-in-law experience equality and dignity. By integrating legal enforcement with education reforms, male engagement programs, and community mobilisation, India can move toward substantive gender justice.

The proposed strategy does not divert resources from girls; rather, it expands the ambit of interventions to include those actors whose behaviour significantly shapes women's lives. A gender-just India requires both protection for daughters and transformation among sons. Only then can patriarchy be meaningfully challenged across households and communities.

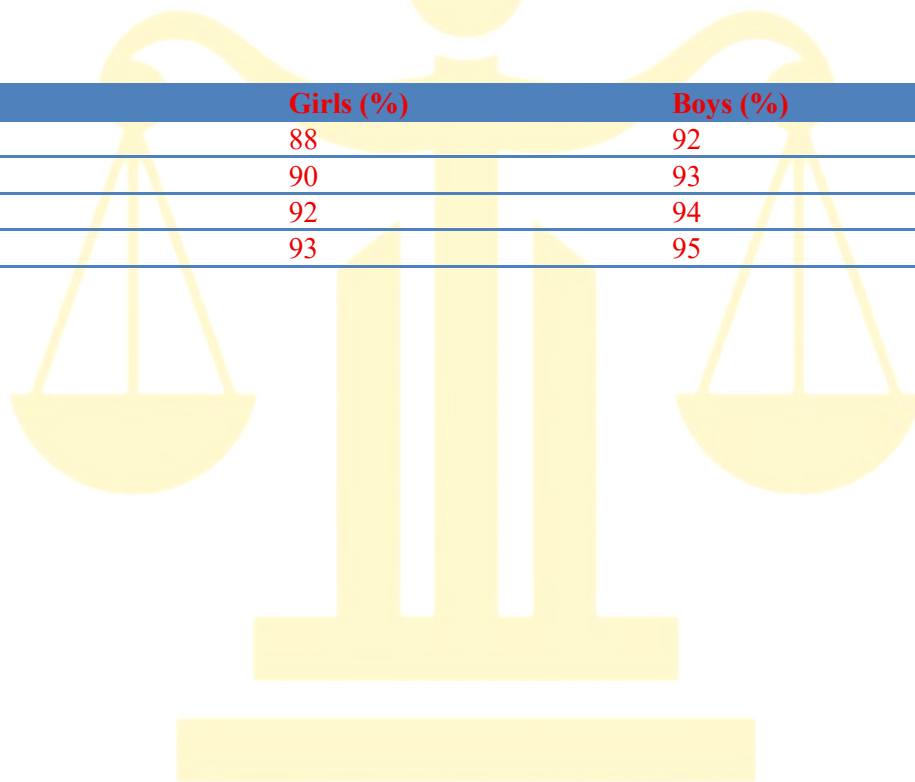


Tables and Statistical Data

Year	Child Sex Ratio (0-6)	Source
2011	919	Census 2011
2015	922	Sample Survey 2015
2017	926	MWCD 2017
2019	930	MWCD 2019
2021	931	MWCD/NCRB 2021

Year	Domestic Violence Cases	Dowry Deaths	Source
2020	235,000	7,000	NCRB 2020
2021	248,000	7,300	NCRB 2021
2022	260,000	7,500	NCRB 2022

Year	Girls (%)	Boys (%)
2015	88	92
2017	90	93
2019	92	94
2021	93	95



Figures and Charts

Figure 1: Child Sex Ratio (0-6 years)

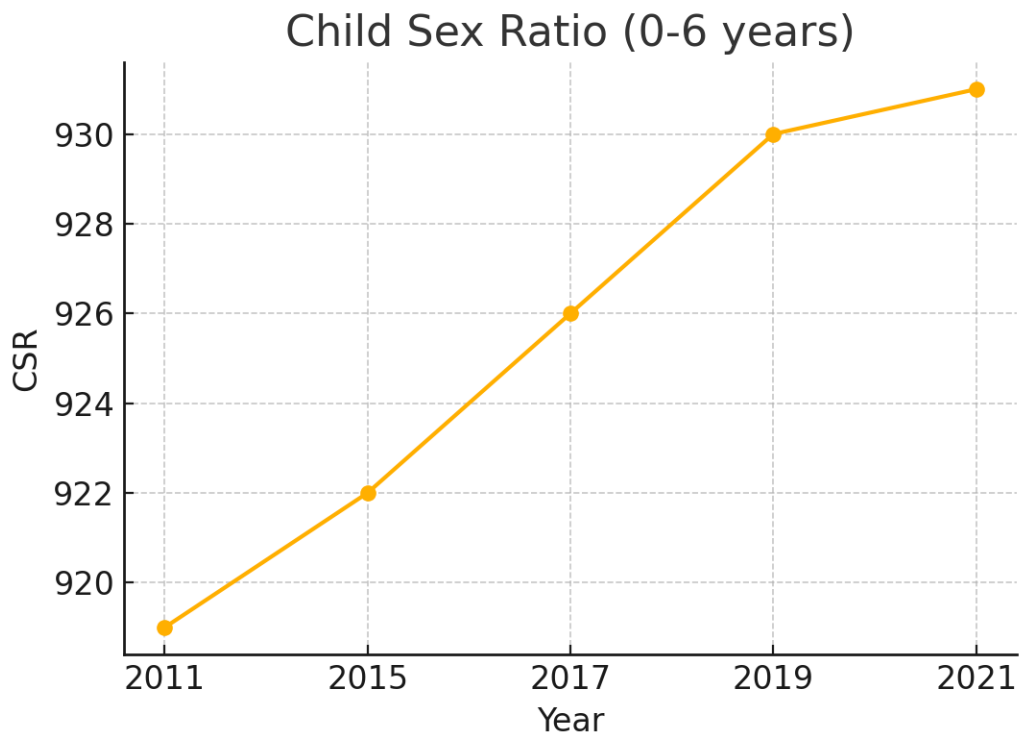
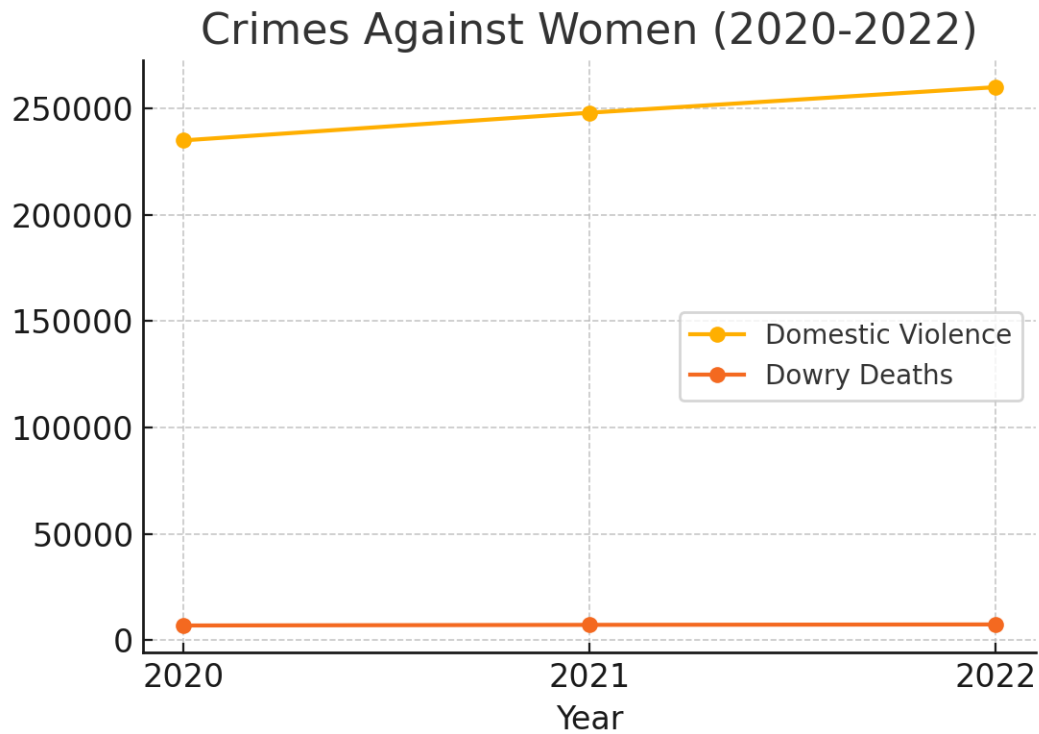
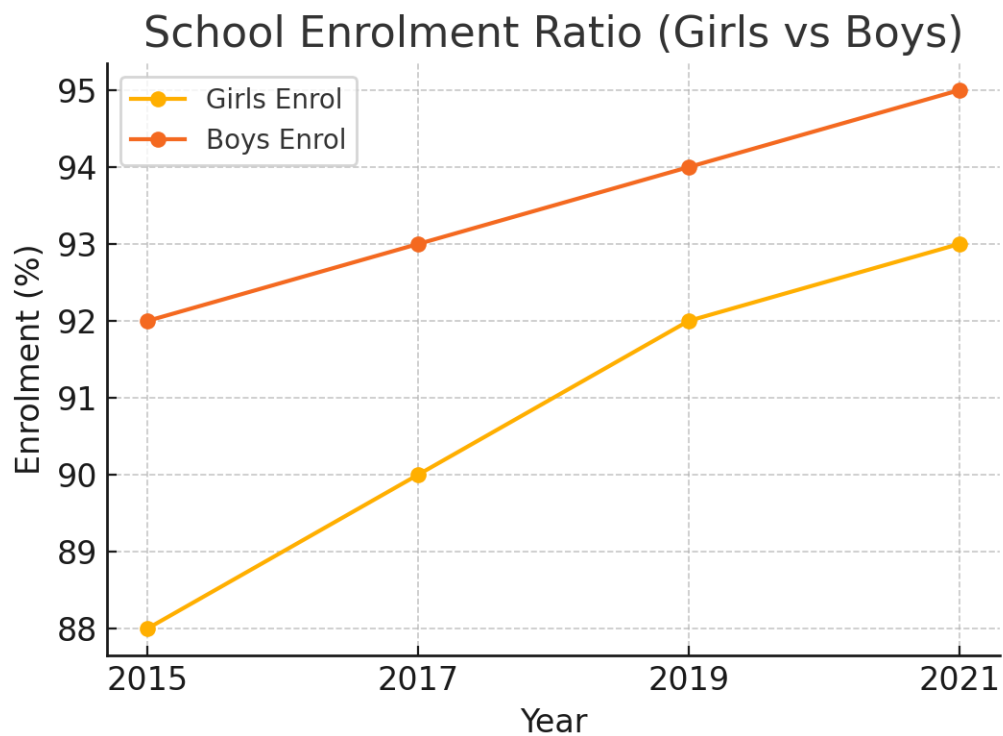


Figure 2: Crimes Against Women (2020-2022)**Figure 3: School Enrolment Ratio (Girls vs Boys)**

References

- Agnes, F. (2020). Law and gender inequality: The politics of women's rights in India. Oxford University Press.
- Agarwal, B. (2018). Gender and green governance: The political economy of women's presence within and beyond community forestry. Oxford University Press.
- Bhatla, N., & Verma, R. (2019). Changing norms: Boys, men and gender equality in India. International Center for Research on Women.
- Chakravarti, U. (2019). Gendering caste: Through a feminist lens. Sage Publications.
- Jaising, I., & Anand, P. (2019). Law, justice and gender: Critical perspectives on the legal system in India. Sage Publications.
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*, 2(3), 274–290.
- Khan, S., & Iyer, S. (2017). Differential investments and child outcomes: Evidence from India. *Journal of Development Studies*, 53(7), 1025–1040.
- Mehra, M. (2019). Negotiating patriarchy: Daughters-in-law and women's rights in India. Zubaan.
- Ministry of Education. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Government of India.
- Ministry of Women and Child Development. (2021). Beti Bachao Beti Padhao: Progress Report. Government of India.
- NCRB. (2022). Crime in India 2022. Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Ramasubban, R. (2020). Patriarchy and education: Boys as agents of change. *Indian Journal of Social Development*, 20(2), 112–130.
- Sudarshan, R., & Jhabvala, R. (2021). Eliminating violence against women in India: Policy and practice. Cambridge University Press.
- UNDP. (2022). Human development report 2021/22. United Nations Development Programme.
- Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma, (2020) 9 SCC 1.
- Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan, (1997) 6 SCC 241.