



Addressing Gender Equality Through Policy And Practice

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Abstract:

Gender equality is fundamental yet complex concept for a developing country like India. Despite various progressive policies of Indian government disparities still exist. The reason of existence of such disparities can be deeply rooted cultural norms, social condition and weak economic factors combined with gap in policies and its implementations. This paper focus on various policies and practices aimed at addressing the gender equality. The paper focuses on various policy measures and community driven programs, those programs have not only provided solution to the Indian society into the tackling the issue of gender equality but also highlighted the untapped areas in which we have to work. The paper will not only try to shed information on the various challenges but also suggestions regarding policy implementation. By exploring the key policies and how they have helped Indian society to evolve over the period of time towards the attainment of gender equality the paper highlights key suggestions for the need of all inclusive approach which involves legal framework at the base level.

Keywords – Social Justice, Sustainable Development, Patriarchal System, Social Stratification, Women Empowerment, Marginalised Gender, Welfare Based Policies, Human Rights, GDP.

Introduction:

Gender equality is very essential when it comes to making a society just and fair for all. While the constitution of India does guarantee equal rights and equal treatment via fundamental rights but unequal treatment of sexes can still be seen in various areas. Indian society's patriarchal roots combined with backward social and cultural practices makes the policies less effective due to which the policy does not achieve its intended goal. So to resolve the issue of gender inequality we need more than just 'good policy' with 'good intentions'. Indian society has witnessed numerous policies being launched over the years aiming to reduce gender inequality and empowering women; however whether the policy will be effective or not will mostly depend on how well those policies have been implemented. The welfare based policies have played essential role into filling the gender gap especially when we see rural area and economically weaker section of society, the change is indeed visible but there is a huge section of society that needs to be taken out of their misery. The finding of the paper reinforce that the effectiveness of policy depends not only on how well the policy was designed but also on the how well it was implemented and introduced to the masses. The general public can play a crucial role onto the effective implementation by being informed and creating awareness among themselves. The paper not only sheds light on need for continue research and exploration of the topic but also the implications of a good policy intervention. By acknowledging the importance of gender equality and probable roadblock which makes it harder to achieve the desired outcome the research paper aims to contribute to the ongoing advancement of knowledge.

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a crucial component of sustainable business models that drive long-term success. By fostering an inclusive workplace that values diverse perspectives, companies can enhance creativity, improve employee satisfaction, and ultimately boost their bottom line. Embracing gender equality as part of a sustainable business strategy not only benefits organizations but also contributes to broader social and economic development, creating a more equitable future for all (Rathod et al., 2024).

Gender equality is essential for fostering inclusive and equitable environments, yet significant disparities persist in various sectors, particularly in access to training opportunities. To address these gaps, tailored training programs must be developed that focus on empowering underrepresented groups and equipping them with the skills needed to succeed in their chosen fields. Investing in comprehensive training initiatives not only promotes gender equality but also enhances overall organizational performance and innovation (Bhave et al., 2022).

Gender equality in management practices is essential for fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace, which can lead to enhanced creativity and innovation. Organizations that prioritize gender equality not only benefit from a broader range of perspectives but also often experience improved employee morale and retention rates. By implementing policies that promote equal opportunities for all genders in leadership roles, businesses can create a more equitable environment that drives overall success (Bhave et al., 2024).

Concept of Gender Equality:

The term gender is derived from the Latin word “genus” referring to kind or race and the term equality is derived from Latin word “aequus”, meaning fair and even, So gender equality means where people are treated equally irrespective of which gender they belong to, it means that treating Women in the same way we treat Men when it comes to social conditions, economic opportunities etc. By allowing a society to be gender equal we allow all the genders with equal opportunity to participate in economic and social events that leads to higher positive economic growth. Gender equality also means that we respect that men and women are different but they both have something unique to offer to the society’s development and if either of them is left behind the probability of achieving full economic capacity is also at risk. It also means giving equal attention to everyone’s needs, rights and wants as a normal social behaviour. For example women’s working or attaining education after marriage should be treated normally.

Importance of Gender Equality:

Gender equality is need of the hour; gender equality not only accelerates economic growth via higher labour participation but also helps a society to be liberal. India’s population consists of 48.41% women; nearly half of the total population, gender equality boosts economic productivity by allowing increased women participation in workforce. There are various studies that have shown that reducing gender gap can significantly improve a country’s GDP. Gender equality also improves educational attainment and skill development of girl child leading to more qualitative and skilled labour for an economy, further an educated and empowered woman will contribute to innovation and entrepreneurship and leadership in various sectors. Gender equality also contributes to better health outcomes via ensuring women’s access to reproductive rights and reducing maternal and child mortality rate. Empowered women make informed decision for themselves and their family leading to a healthy population. Gender equality breaks the vicious cycle of poverty by making women financially independent leading to a women led household where investment on child education is far better than a household which is run by only one earner. A household where men and women earn equally and contribute equally achieves better

prosperity than a patriarchal household where women are often oppressed and abused. Gender equality makes a society better by reducing crime against women like domestic abuse as the participation of women in governance increases leading to a policy which is more inclusive in nature.

Gender Inequality in India:

In our country where we treat women as goddesses paradoxically the equal opportunities are denied, According to the Gender Gap Report 2023, India ranks 127th out of 146 countries in terms of gender parity. Following statistics show the issue and their sources.

Socio cultural disparities: According to the National Family Health Survey (2019-21) the overall sex ratio in India is 1020 female per 1000 Male but the sex ratio at birth remains low at 929 indication continuous sex preference at birth. As per the same report the literacy rate in male is much higher when compared to females where the literacy rate of Men is 84.7% and for Women it is 70.3%. According to National Crime Record Bureau's report on "crime in India 2021 report" gender based violence are over 4 lakh in the year 2021 where women were the victim, however these figure only shows the reported crime against women the real figures are much higher as majority of the cases go unreported.

Economic Disparity: According to the 18th edition of Global Gender Gap report 2024 Indian women earn 40% of their male counterpart. According to periodic labour force survey 2023-24 the rate of unemployment for women has increased from 2.9% in 2022 to 3.2% while for men it has slightly decreased from 3.3% in 2022 to 3.2%. According to the same report Worker Population ratio has increased for male and female both to 76.3% and 40.3% respectively but the disparity is still wide and alarming.

Political Disparity: There are currently 74 female MP (14%) in the Lok Sabha which shows that apart from various reservation bills, participation in politics is very less.

Causes of Gender Inequality in India:

India's journey of achieving a gender equal society has been a remarkable journey with some difficulties. There can be various reasons for gender inequality like illiteracy, poor healthcare system poverty etc. some of the reasons of gender inequality are as follows-

Poverty: Poverty leads people to not having access to basic resources leading to a society that is unequal and prefers giving all those limited resources to one specific gender leaving other one with little or nothing. For example if a poor family has little money to invest they will always choose to spend that money on the male child.

Education: Due to lack of education people's thought process becomes rigid and conservative, where they feel that educating the newer generation is a waste of resource that lead the society into a vicious cycle of uneducated people with little to no sense of gender equality.

Patriarchy: Majority of the Indian households follow patriarchal system where Male members are treated as the decision makers of the house and women are restricted to household chores with no participation in decision making process, making the new generation feel that Male of the family are superior and women are inferior leading to a society where inequality is normalised and celebrated as a part of "culture".

Social And Cultural Norms: Indian society has always preferred male over female with the perception of male being the asset of the family whereas females are often treated as a liability. This further expands into the notion of women should follow the decision made by the bread winner (Male) of the house. The access to basic human right is often denied or provided as a favour to the girls in the name of culture or normal social behaviour for example- access school

or taking the decision of working, which occupation to choose etc. very often women feel that their access to job or education is luxury that they should be thankful to have.

Poor Medical Care: Due to poverty and illiteracy health of females are often ignored leading to malnourished mothers and increase in infant mortality rate.

Job segregation: one of the reasons of gender inequality within employment is the division of jobs. Indians have this notion of that men being equipped to handle certain jobs and majority of the time those jobs involve higher payment leading to low income jobs for women and increasing the wage disparity. Not only the women face discrimination in the workplace but also they are mostly involved in unpaid labour work, their unpaid work at their household are seen as her “Duty” whereas the same work done by the men are often applauded.

Lack of political representation: as mentioned above women’s participation in lok sabha is 14% leading to policy making powers into the hands of men with very little to no contribution of women’s perspective leading to ineffective policies for women.

Policies for Gender Equality:

India has passed numerous legislations under central and state government to resolve the problem of gender inequality that aims to secure equal rights of women in various spheres like social life, personal life and economic accessibility. Few of the legislations that we are going to discuss are as follows-

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao: The scheme focuses on ensuring protection, survival and education of the girl child, launched as a joint initiative by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Education (India) on 22 January 2015 which is still active. The key achievement of the scheme are the sex ratio at birth has improved from 918 (in 2014-15) to 930 (in 2023-24), girls gross enrollment ratio has gone up from 75.51% (in 2014-15) to 78% (in 2023-24) and institutional deliveries has exponentially increased from 61% (in 2014-15) to 97% (in 2023-24). This implies that the scheme is achieving the goals but there is a long path to go.

Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana: The scheme was launched by the Department of Financial Services and the Ministry of Finance in 2015 for providing loans up to 10 lakh to the non corporate, micro enterprises etc. MUDRA stands for Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency Ltd. Has created three products namely- ‘Shishu’, ‘Kishore’ and ‘Tarun’ as per the growth and funding needs of the beneficiary. Under Shishu loan amount of 50,000 Rs. is covered, under Kishore covering of loan amount is above 50,000 Rs. And upto 5 Lakh and lastly under Kishore loan amount of above 5 lakh upto 10 lakh is covered. The MUDRA has successfully sanctioned over 32.53 crore loans involving amount of 17.32 lakh crore. Since its launch in 2015 the loans have been given to disadvantaged sections of our society like women entrepreneurs, SC/ST/OBC borrowers, minority borrowers etc. As per the survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Employment , PM MUDRA yojna has helped in generating 1.12 crore net addition employment between the year 2015 and 2018 out of which 62% accounted for women employment.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna- Urban: The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna was launched on 25th june 2015 which was implemented by Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. The aim of this scheme is to make home loan affordable for poor people living in urban areas by providing subsidy on the interest rate of a home loan. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna – Urban covers economically weaker section (maximum annual family income 3 Lakh), low income group (maximum Annual family income of 6 Lakh) and middle income group (maximum annual family income of Rs. 18 Lakh). The mission promotes women empowerment by providing the

ownership of house to the women or in joint names. The scheme has sanctioned 122.69 lakh houses. The scheme has successfully delivered 60 lakh plus houses to the beneficiaries.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana: Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana yojna is a maternity benefit program launched by the Ministry of Women and Child development on 1st January 2017. The scheme has successfully achieved the milestone of 1 Crore beneficiaries with the total amount distribution of 4000 crores. The scheme aims to provide direct cash benefits to pregnant women in their bank account to meet their increased nutritional needs and partially compensate for the wage loss. The scheme is for pregnant women except for those working under either central government or state government. The receiver will get a 5000 in three installments.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana: The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna has been launched under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas with the purpose of making LPG available and affordable to the rural and disadvantaged households which were dependent on traditional sources of cooking i.e coal, dried leaf, cow dung cakes etc. Usage of traditional fuel like wood will not only have negative impact on environment as it creates harmful gases like CO₂ (Carbon dioxide) and CO (Carbon monoxide) the women cooking with those traditional method will have a negative impact of it on their health as they are also sitting close to the burning wood and inhaling those gases. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna aims to tackle both the issues by providing financial Aid of 1600 Rs. For each LPG connection which is installed in below poverty line household. According to the recent data published by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas more than 10 Crore connections has been provided under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna.

Sukanya Samridhi Yojana: The scheme is aimed to meet the educational and marriage expenses of a girls(below 10 years age) which was launched by the Ministry of Finance on 22nd January 2015 as a part of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign. Under Sukanya Samridhi Yojna the government of India allows Parents of Girl child to open the Account in the name of their girl child and can deposit amount as minimum as 250 Rs. Upto 1.5 lakh in a financial year. The deposit earns 8.2% rate of interest and allows 50% withdrawal when the girl turns 18 for the higher education purposes. The account's maturity is on the completion of 21 years from the date of opening.

Suggestions to build gender equal society:

To build a society with gender equality we have to focus on three major areas i.e Economic freedom and accessibility, equal treatment in the society for all gender and equal representation in politics. Building a society without gender inequality is not possible but our objective is to reduce the degree of inequality to make our economy inclusive prosperous and equal for all. We need to teach our children that their thoughts and their contribution are as important as the opposite gender, we should not only teach them to respect their opposite gender with respect but also perform the same idea in our life that there is no such thing as “a man’s job” or “a woman’s job”. Allowing children to have equal access to education and being able to perform their fundamental and basic human rights makes the society more prosperous and inclusive. To make sure that women’s participation in politics increases new and effective policies should be made with better implementation for an inclusive policy making environment. And lastly being aware of upcoming policies and our fundamental rights to create a society with equality and accessibility for all. Gender equality will be achieved through collective practice and making sure that no gender is left behind in the process of development.

Conclusion:

By allowing each and every individual to have equal access to basic resources will not only increase our economic productivity but also our social environment leading to lesser crime better social and political environment for all. Gender equality is not something that will benefit only women but it will enhance our economy's developmental process by allowing women to participate and be a part of production process. Gender equality will also allow better research and developmental process leading to more innovation and better quality of labour for the entire world. We should also keep in mind that creating a gender equal country is not just the objective of government but also the duty of the country's citizen.

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