Research Paper

EPRA International Journal of Economic and Business Review-Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume - 14, Issue - 1, January 2026 | e-ISSN: 2347 - 9671| p- ISSN: 2349 – 0187

SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.862 || ISI Value: 1.433 || Journal DOI URL: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra2012

INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND GENDER EQUALITY IN VIKSIT BHARAT@2045

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ABSTRACT DOI No: 10.36713/epra25840 Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra25840

Gender equality is a fundamental pillar for achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat (Developed India). A nation cannot progress to its full potential if half of its population faces systemic barriers to education, employment, healthcare, safety, and decision-making. Gender equality is not merely a social or moral imperative; it is an economic, political, and developmental necessity. Ensuring equal rights, opportunities, and participation for all genders is essential for inclusive growth, sustainable development, and national prosperity. India has made notable progress in advancing gender equality through constitutional safeguards, progressive legislation, and targeted government initiatives. The Women's participation in political and administrative decision-making ensures more representative, inclusive, and responsive policies. From local self-governance to national leadership, women bring diverse perspectives that improve policy outcomes, particularly in areas such as health, education, social welfare, and environmental sustainability.Viksit Bharat can only be realized when every individual, regardless of gender, has equal opportunities to learn, work, lead, and thrive. Empowering women and ensuring gender justice will accelerate economic growth, strengthen social cohesion, and pave the way for a truly developed nation.

KEY WORDS: *Gender Inclusive growth Equality Viksit Bharat*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Gender equality stands as a cornerstone of modern societies, signifying fairness, justice, and opportunity for all individuals regardless of gender. In the Indian context, the pursuit of gender equality is not justa moral imperative but also an economic and social necessity. As India marches forward on the path of development, the concept of "Viksit Bharat" or Developed India necessitates a robust commitment to gender equality across all sectors of society. In this article, we delve into the significance of gender equality within the framework of Viksit Bharat, exploring its implications, challenges, and the way forward.Gender equality is not merely a slogan but a fundamental principle that underpins the holistic development of a nation. In the vision of Viksit Bharat, where India aspires to achieve comprehensive development across economic, social, and cultural dimensions, gender equality emerges as a non-negotiable aspect. The empowerment of women and the elimination of gender-based discrimination are pivotal to realizing the full potential of the nation.

1.2 CHALLENGES TO GENDER EQUALITY IN INDIA

The despite significant strides in various spheres, India continues to grapple with deep-rooted gender disparities. These challenges pose formidable obstacles to the realization of Viksit Bharat:

1. **Gender-based Violence:** Violence against women remains a pervasive issue, reflecting deep-seated patriarchal attitudes and societal norms. Addressing this menace requires not just legal reforms but also a cultural shift towards gender-sensitive attitudes and behaviours.
2. **Gender Pay Gap:** Bridging this gap is crucial for fostering economic empowerment and achieving inclusive growth. Implementing gender-sensitive wage policies, promoting equal opportunities for career advancement, and ensuring transparency in hiring and promotion processes are essential steps in addressing the gender pay gap.
3. **Limited Access to Education:** Despite advancements in education, many girls in India still face barriers to accessing quality education..
4. **Underrepresentation in Leadership:** Women continue to be underrepresented in decision- making positions across sectors, including politics,
5. **Gender Equality and Viksit Bharat**: business, and academia. Breaking the glass ceiling and promoting women's leadership is essential for fostering diversity and inclusive governance.
6. **Cultural Norms and Stereotypes:** Deep-rooted cultural norms and stereotypes perpetuate gender roles and restrict women's autonomy and agency. Challenging these norms and promoting gender-sensitive socialization is critical for fostering an environment of equality and respect. Educational campaigns, media initiatives, and community-led interventions aimed at challenging harmful gender norms and promoting positive

representations of women can help change societal attitudes and behaviours.

1.3 INITIATIVE TAKEN BY INDIAN GOVERNMENT

Beti BachaoBetiPadhao (BBBP)

- This campaign was launched in 2015 by the Government of India with the aim of addressing the declining child sex ratio and promoting the education of girls.
- The campaign targets three main objectives: preventing gender-biased sex-selective elimination, ensuring survival and protection of the girl child, and ensuring education and participation of the girl child.
- It involves coordinated efforts between the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and Ministry of Human Resource Development, along with state governments and grassroots organizations.
- Key activities under BBBP include awareness campaigns, advocacy programs, capacity- building initiatives for stakeholders, and the implementation of supportive policies and schemes at the national and state levels.

PradhanMantriMatruVandanaYojana (PMMVY)

- PMMVY is a maternity benefit program launched in 2017 to provide financial assistance to pregnant and lactating women for their first live birth.
- Under the scheme, eligible beneficiaries receive cash incentives directly into their bank accounts in instalments, with the aim of compensating them for wage loss during childbirth and supporting their nutritional needs.
- PMMVY promotes institutional delivery and encourages pregnant women to avail prenatal and postnatal care services, thus contributing to reducing maternal and infant mortality rates.
- The scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in collaboration with state governments and union territories.

Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK)

- MSK is an initiative launched under the National Mission for Empowerment of Women to empower rural women through community participation.
- The program aims to create awareness about various government schemes and programs for women's welfare, facilitate access to entitlements and services, and promote women's entrepreneurship and skill development.
- MSKs are established at the village, block, and district levels, with a range of services including information dissemination, counselling, training programs, and linkages with livelihood opportunities.
- The initiative encourages the formation of self- help groups (SHGs) and women's collectives to enhance social cohesion and economic empowerment among rural women.

National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)

- NRLM, also known as Aajeevika, is a flagship program aimed at reducing poverty and promoting sustainable livelihoods among rural communities, with a special focus on women.
- The mission provides financial assistance, skill development training, and access to credit and market linkages to empower women to engage in income-generating activities and become economically self-reliant.
- NRLM promotes the formation of women's SHGs as a platform for collective action, resource pooling, and skill enhancement, thereby fostering women's leadership and decision-making roles within their communities.
- The program operates through a network of dedicated support structures at the village, block, and district levels, facilitating capacity-building, monitoring, and evaluation of women-centric initiatives.

1.4 GENDER EQUALITY AND VIKSIT BHARAT

Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)

- PMSMA is a maternity care initiative launched in 2016 to provide comprehensive antenatal care to pregnant women, particularly those from marginalized communities.
- Under the scheme, pregnant women receive free antenatal check-ups, diagnostic tests, and counselling services on nutrition, breastfeeding, and maternal health.
- PMSMA aims to promote safe motherhood practices, early detection and management of high-risk pregnancies, and timely access to quality maternal healthcare services.
- The initiative operates through a network of public and private healthcare facilities, community health workers, and accredited social health activists (ASHAs), ensuring coverage and accessibility of services in both urban and rural areas.

Ujjwala Scheme

- The Ujjwala Scheme, launched in 2016, aims to improve the health and well-being of women by providing free LPG connections to below poverty line households.
- By reducing their dependence on solid fuels for cooking, such as firewood and cow dung, the scheme contributes to women's empowerment by saving their time and improving their health outcomes.
- Under the scheme, eligible beneficiaries receive financial assistance for the upfront cost of LPG connection, along with a subsidy on the purchase of LPG cylinders for initial refills.
- Ujjwala promotes environmental sustainability, reduces indoor air pollution, and enhances the safety and dignity of women, particularly in rural areas where traditional cooking practices pose health hazards and time burdens on women.

Women Helpline (WHL)

- The Women Helpline (WHL) - 181 is a toll-free emergency helpline operated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to provide assistance and support services to women in distress.
- WHL offers counseling, referral services, and assistance in accessing medical, legal, and shelter support for

women facing violence, harassment, or any form of distress.

- ❖ The helpline operates 24/7 and is staffed bytrained counsellors and support personnel who handle calls with sensitivity and confidentiality.
- ❖ WHL aims to empower women to seek help and access resources to address their immediate needs and long-term solutions to their problems, thereby contributing to their safety, well-being, and autonomy.

One Stop Centre (OSC) Scheme

- ❖ The One Stop Centre (OSC) Scheme, launched in 2015, provides integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking.
- ❖ OSCs offer a range of services such as medical assistance, legal aid, counseling, temporary shelter, police assistance, and rehabilitation support under one roof.
- ❖ These centers operate in every district across India, providing accessible and comprehensive support to women in distress, with a focus on addressing their immediate needs and facilitating their recovery and rehabilitation.

National Creche Scheme

- ❖ The National Creche Scheme, initiated in 1971 and revamped in 2017, aims to provide safe and quality daycare facilities for children of working mothers, particularly those from marginalized communities.
- ❖ Under the scheme, crèches are established in workplaces, construction sites, and urban slums, offering childcare services, nutrition support, early childhood education, and health monitoring for children aged 6 months to 6 years.
- ❖ By enabling working mothers to balance their caregiving responsibilities with employment or livelihood activities, the scheme promotes women's workforce participation and economic empowerment while ensuring the holistic development of children.

1.5 SUPPORT TO TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN (STEP)

- ❖ The Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP), launched in 1986, aims to enhance the employability and income-generating capacities of women through skill development and training.
- ❖ STEP provides vocational training in traditional and non-traditional trades, entrepreneurship development, and capacity-building programs tailored to the needs of women from diverse backgrounds.
- ❖ The program supports women's participation in various sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, handlooms, services, and small-scale industries, facilitating their entry into the formal workforce and promoting economic self-reliance.

Digital India Initiative:

- TheDigitalIndiainitiative,launchedin2015,aims to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy by leveraging digital technologies and connectivity.
- Theinitiativeincludesvariouscomponents and schemes such as Digital Literacy Mission, BharatNet, Common Service Centres (CSCs),and e-Governance initiatives, which have a significant impact on women's empowermentandinclusion.
- Digital literacy programs and access to digital platforms enable women to access information, education, healthcare, financial services, and employment opportunities, thus bridging the digitalgenderdivideandenhancingtheirsocio-economicempowerment.

Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP):

- PMBJP, launched in 2008, aims to provide affordable and quality generic medicines to all citizens, especially the economically weaker sections of society.
- Under the scheme, Jan AushadhiKendras are
- Established across the country to dispense generic medicines at substantially lower prices than branded drugs. Access to affordable healthcare, including essential medicines, improves the healthoutcomesandwellbeingofwomenandtheirfamilies ,reducingout-of-pocketexpensesand financial burdens on households.

National Health Mission (NHM):

- NHM, launched in 2005, aims to provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services to all citizens, with a focus on maternal and child health, reproductive health, and family planning.
- NHM also promotes community participation, women's empowerment, and convergence with other health and development programs to address gender disparities in health access and outcomes.

❖ **SukanyaSamriddhiYojana (SSY):**

- Sukanya SamriddhiYojana, launched in 2015 under the BetiBachaoBetiPadhao campaign, aims to encourage savings for the girl child's future education and marriage expenses.
- Under the scheme, parents or guardians can open a savings account in the name of the girl child before she attains the age of 10 years. Contributions to the account are eligible for tax benefits, and the account earns a higher interest rate than other savings schemes.
- SSY empowers families to financially plan for their daughters' future, promoting their education and well-being while fostering a culture of saving and investment.

National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP):

- NRDWP includes provisions for water quality monitoring, community participation, capacity-building, and the promotion of decentralizedwater supply systems, ensuring equitable accessto safe drinking water for all.

Rashtriya MahilaKosh (RMK):

- RashtriyaMahilaKosh, establishedin1993,is a non-profit organization under the Ministry of Women and Child

Development that provides microfinance and credit facilities to poor and marginalizedwomen.RMK offers loans for income-generating activities,entrepreneurshipdevelopment,and women's self-help groups (SHGs),enabling women to start or expand their businesses and improve their socio-economic status.

- The organization also provides capacity-building training, financial literacy programs, and support services to empower women economically and enhance their access to credit and financial resources.

National Nutrition Mission (POSHANAbhiyaan):

- POSHAN Abhiyaan, launched in 2018, aims to address malnutrition among women and children by focusing on maternal and childhealth, nutrition education, and behavioral change communication.
- The mission targets pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children less than 6 years of age, providing them with essential nutrition services, including supplementary nutrition, counseling, and healthcare.
- By improving maternal and child nutrition outcomes, POSHAN Abhiyaan contributes to women's well-being, reproductive health, and empowerment, breaking the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition and poverty.

Education and Awareness

- Enhance access to quality education for girls and women, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.
- Promote gender-sensitive curriculum and teaching methods to challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality from an early age.
- Conduct awareness campaigns to educate communities about the importance of gender equality, women's rights, and the benefits of women'sempowerment.

Economic Empowerment

- Facilitate access to finance, credit, and markets for women entrepreneurs and small-scale businesses.
- Provideskilldevelopmentandvocationaltraining programs tailored to the needs of women in diversesectors.
- Promote women's participation in non-traditional fields and leadership roles in the workforce and decision-makingpositions.

Health and Well-being

- Strengthen healthcare infrastructure and servicesto address women's specific health needs, including maternal and reproductive health.
- Expand access to family planning services, contraceptives, and reproductive healthcare, with a focus on rural and underserved areas.
- Combat gender-based violence and provide comprehensive support services for survivors, including medical, legal, and psychosocialassistance.

Political Participation and Representation:

- Increase women's participation and representationin political institutions, including local governance bodies, legislatures, and decision-making bodies.
- Implement quotas or affirmative action measures to ensure adequate representation of women in elected positions.
- Provide capacity-building and leadership training programs for women aspiring to enter politics and publicservice.

Technology and Innovation

- Harnessthepoweroftechnologyandinnovation to empower women economically, socially, and politically.
- Promote digital literacy and access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) for women andgirls.
- Support initiatives that leverage technology for women's entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, healthcare, and education.

Community Engagement and Social Norms

- Engage communities, religious leaders, and civil society organizations in promoting gender equality and challenging harmful social norms and practices.
- Encourage men and boys to become allies in the fight for gender equality and to actively support women's rights and empowerment.
- Foster collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, academia, and grassroots organizations to drive gender-sensitive development initiatives.

Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation

- Conduct research and data collection to understand the root causes of gender inequality and to inform evidence-based policies and programs.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress towards gender equality targets and to identify gaps and areas for improvement.
- Invest in gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis to ensure that interventions are targeted and effective in addressing the needs of women and girls.

1.6 INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Strengthen collaboration with international organizations, donor agencies, and bilateral partners to share best practices, resources, and expertise in advancing gender equality.
- Participate in global initiatives and conventions on women's rights and gender equality, and align national strategies with international commitments.
- Build alliances and networks with feminist movements and women's organizations at the regional and global levels to amplify voices and advocate for gender justice.

1.7 INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

- Promote transparency and accountability in governance structures to ensure that gender equality commitments are prioritized and implemented effectively.
- Establish mechanisms for reporting, complaints, and redressal of gender-based discrimination and violence, with safeguards to protect whistle-blowers and survivors.
- Strengthen institutional capacity and coordination among government departments, ministries, and

agencies responsible for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment.

1.8 CONCLUSION

The Gender equality is indispensable to the realization of Viksit Bharat, as it forms the foundation of inclusive, sustainable, and balanced national development. A truly developed nation is one where all individuals, regardless of gender, enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and dignity. While India has made meaningful progress through legal reforms, social initiatives, and policy interventions, the journey toward complete gender equality remains unfinished. Persistent challenges such as unequal workforce participation, gender-based violence, and limited access to leadership roles and deep-rooted social stereotypes continue to restrict women's full potential. For India to achieve its developmental aspirations, gender equality must move beyond policy intent to practical implementation. Economic empowerment through education, skill development, entrepreneurship, and fair employment opportunities is crucial. Equally important is ensuring women's safety, healthcare access, and representation in decision-making processes at all levels.

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