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PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of public policy in advancing gender equality in India within the framework of constitutional mandates, legislative reforms, and development-oriented welfare interventions. Gender equality has long been recognized as a cornerstone of social justice and inclusive growth; however, despite sustained policy attention, India continues to experience significant gender disparities across economic participation, education, health outcomes, and political representation. Using a qualitative policy analysis approach, this study critically evaluates major gender-focused and gender-mainstreaming initiatives, including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, gender budgeting, political reservation policies, and women-centric social welfare schemes. The paper further explores implementation challenges arising from patriarchal norms, institutional constraints, and intersectional inequalities linked to caste, class, tribe, and region. Drawing on secondary data from government reports, academic literature, and international indices, the study argues that while India possesses a robust normative and policy framework, outcomes remain uneven due to gaps between policy intent and execution. The article concludes with policy recommendations emphasizing outcome-based gender budgeting, institutional accountability, intersectional targeting, and long-term social norm transformation. The findings contribute to contemporary debates on gender-responsive governance and offer insights for strengthening public policy design and implementation in India.

KEYWORDS: *Gender Equality, Empowerment, Development, Public Policy, Women's Empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality will be achieved only when women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights, and obligations in public policy. When women are empowered, the whole family benefits, thus benefiting society in future generations. Gender equality and public policy are interrelated. The public policy has played a crucial role in empowering women and achieving gender equality. Recently, several policies and schemes have been implemented for women's development. This paper explores the implications of different practical requirements that require a holistic approach, including political, social, health, economic, enrollment, safety, legal framework, digital employment, and gender-responsive budgeting. Generally, the national policy for women, framed by the government of India, aimed at empowering women and promoting gender equality. The five-year plan in India has taken different schemes and policies for gender equality. The policy of impact in gender equality, Startup India (2016), Mudra loans(2015), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015), Integrated Rural Development Programme, Swawalabh, Ujjawala, National Rural Health Mission, SHG. Gender equality is a social justice matter, important to women's well-being and development, like the triple-talak act and legal marriage age 18-21. The contribution of SDG (2015) and MDG (2000) towards women empowerment and gender equality is still in a critical position to make Viksit Bharat 2047 Successful.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are the third of eight MDGs. In 2021, UNICEF released its new gender policy (articulating our vision for advancing gender equality. Gender budgeting demonstrates a continuous commitment to achieving the goals of Sustainable Development Goal 5. The high–level political forum 2025 will be a critical checkpoint for re-committing to SDG 5.2021-2030, a more ambitious vision for gender equality and empowerment of all children, adolescents, and women. Women's empowerment on the eight march 2025 theme "For All Women and Girls; Rights Equality. Empowerment. In recent years, India ranked 131st out of 148 countries in the World Economic Forum's global gender gap report.

Men and women without distinction of discrimination as to race, colour, language, or religion are called for gender equality. Public policy makes development stronger and more sustainable in society. Gender equality means different living situations for men and women, equal rights and opportunities, and participation in all spheres. Gender equality is a core human right that guarantees fair treatment in all areas. Women's empowerment, gender neutrality, and gender equity are practices and opportunities. Equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men in all dimensions.

Since independence, the notion of gender equality and public policy has been a comprehensive discussion in gender development. A public policy promoting gender equality plays a crucial role in economic participation and decision–making. Many policies interrelated decisions for women's self-reliance in gender equity, human rights, environment, economic transport, social security in society, health, migration, marginalized individuals, and other activities for women's empowerment. National and state policies must be revised in gender rights, human rights, education, health, power, and decision-making.

Gender Mainstreaming: This approach views gender equality not as an isolated concern but as a vital aspect of informed

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policymaking, aiming to incorporate gender considerations in all policy stages.

Gender Regime Theory: The gender equality and public policy, this theory analyses how gendered patterns and power structures are implemented day to day in the public sector. It helps to understand how to structure both works to hinder gender equality.

Feminist theory and Social Constructionism: The frameworks emphasize that gender equality in societal beliefs, cultural norms, and structures contributes to gender inequality, which turns public policy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dwivedi. S (2025). "Women's empowerment in India and its various dimensions." his paper aims to present the multidimensional empowerment of women from a holistic perspective and toward a more equal society through policy.

Adhikary, S (2025)." Men's Empowerment in India. "This paper discusses the importance of empowering women, their rights, and building their confidence. Empowerment is not only about improving the quality of life and creating a balanced world. Women face challenges globally and require different strategies in Society.

Muthunzi, K /Zondi, S (2025). National framework for women's employment and gender equality policy as a strategy for South African local Government. This paper analyzes women's challenges concerning the monitoring and evaluating gender programmes. The Government contributes to the outlook of public policy effectiveness of the program and strengthens gender equality.

Marta S(2006).‘’ Gender and public policies. This article analyzes programmes from three sectors: Health, violence against women, and employment and income generation.

Sunder. I (2017) "End of Equality and Women's Empowerment. "This paper deals with the importance of gender equality in achieving women's empowerment. It outlines the gender inequality scenario in India and the importance of gender and equality.

Paola. P (2020) "Under equality and public policy. "This paper analyses how Gender equality and public policy are strictly interrelated. However, the road to achieving equality between men and women reduces the gender balance in all dimensions.

Devi Rama T (2017). "'End Gender Equality and Women Empowerment" '. His paper's Millennium Development Goal emphasizes gender equality and women's empowerment.

Kabeer. N (2005) "Under equality and empowerment: a critical analysis of the third millennium Goal". His article discusses the third Millennium Development Goal on gender equality and women's empowerment. It explores the concept of public policy and gender equality in education, employment, and political participation.

Gottfried, H. H. Reese, L. (2020). Wayne State University" Under, policy, politics, and work: Feminist comparative and transnational research. This article reviews feminist comparative and transnational research dynamics and determinants, both national and supranational, of policy, and the implicit notions of gender equity for future policy analysis.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific goals of the study are as follows

1. To understand the importance of gender competent public policies.
2. To promote gender mainstreaming in the national development process.
3. To examine the various public policies in India regarding gender equality.
4. To know the gender equality and the share of women in economic participation and opportunity.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper is a descriptive analysis of "Gender equality towards public policy in India, " carried out using primary and secondary data analysis. The qualitative study would collect secondary data, LOK Sabha TV, News magazine, ProQuest store, relevant books, journals, Articles, periodical magazines, and websites—government of India National Family Health Survey reports, etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Gender-competent public policies are essential for promoting social justice, equity, and inclusive development. Such policies go beyond gender-neutral approaches by explicitly recognizing that men, women, and gender-diverse individuals experience public institutions, markets, and social structures differently due to historically embedded power relations and social norms. Understanding the importance of gender-competent policies is therefore crucial for addressing structural inequalities and ensuring effective policy outcomes.
    - First, gender-competent public policies help **identify and address differential impacts** of policies on various gender groups. Policies designed without a gender lens often reinforce existing inequalities by assuming uniform needs and capacities. For example, labor market or migration policies that ignore unpaid care work disproportionately burden women, limiting their economic participation. Gender-competent policies incorporate gender-disaggregated data and intersectional analysis to ensure that policy design and implementation respond to diverse lived realities.
    - Second, such policies contribute to **equitable access to resources and opportunities**. Gender-based disparities in education, health, employment, and political participation are not merely individual outcomes but reflections of systemic barriers. Gender-competent public policies aim to remove these barriers through targeted interventions such as affirmative

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action, gender-responsive budgeting, and inclusive service delivery mechanisms. These approaches ensure that marginalized genders are not excluded from development benefits.

- Third, gender-competent policies enhance **governance effectiveness and policy efficiency**. Evidence from development and governance studies suggests that policies aligned with gender realities yield better outcomes in areas such as public health, education, poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability. When women and gender minorities are included in decision-making processes, policy priorities tend to be more responsive to community needs, thereby improving institutional accountability and public trust.
- Fourth, gender-competent public policies play a critical role in **upholding human rights and constitutional commitments**. International frameworks such as CEDAW and the Sustainable Development Goals emphasize gender equality as both a moral imperative and a legal obligation of the state. By mainstreaming gender considerations into public policy, governments fulfil their commitments to non-discrimination, dignity, and equal citizenship.

Finally, the importance of gender-competent public policies lies in their potential to **transform social norms and power relations**. Rather than merely accommodating gender differences, transformative policies challenge patriarchal structures and promote long-term social change. By addressing issues such as gender-based violence, unequal care responsibilities, and political under-representation, these policies contribute to sustainable and inclusive development.

2. Promoting gender mainstreaming in the national development process is a critical objective of gender-competent public policies. Gender mainstreaming refers to the systematic integration of gender perspectives into all stages of policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation across sectors such as education, health, employment, infrastructure, and governance. Its primary aim is to ensure that development initiatives do not perpetuate gender inequalities but instead contribute to gender equity and social justice. At the national level, development policies often appear gender-neutral; however, in practice, they may produce gender-differentiated outcomes due to unequal access to resources, power, and opportunities. Gender mainstreaming addresses this gap by recognizing gender as a cross-cutting development concern rather than a sector-specific issue. By embedding gender analysis within macroeconomic planning, sectoral policies, and institutional frameworks, governments can ensure that development benefits are equitably distributed among all genders. Furthermore, gender mainstreaming strengthens the effectiveness and sustainability of national development outcomes. Policies that incorporate gender perspectives are more responsive to the needs of diverse population groups, leading to improved outcomes in poverty reduction, human capital formation, and social protection. For instance, integrating gender concerns into employment and skill development policies can enhance women's labor force participation and productivity, thereby contributing to inclusive economic growth. Gender mainstreaming also enhances institutional accountability and democratic governance. The use of gender-responsive budgeting, gender audits, and Grievance disaggregated data enables policymakers to assess the differential impacts of public expenditure and development programs. Such tools ensure transparency in resource allocation and facilitate evidence-based policymaking aligned with national and international gender equality commitments.

Finally, promoting gender mainstreaming in the national development process contributes to transformative social change. It challenges entrenched patriarchal norms and power relations by institutionalizing gender equality as a core development principle. By moving beyond welfare-oriented approaches to rights-based and participatory frameworks, gender mainstreaming ensures that national development processes are inclusive, equitable, and sustainable.

3. Examining the various public policies in India related to gender equality is essential for understanding the state's commitment to addressing gender-based disparities and promoting inclusive development. India's policy framework on gender equality has evolved through constitutional provisions, legislative measures, national policies, and welfare-oriented schemes aimed at ensuring equal rights, opportunities, and protection for women and gender-diverse populations. At the constitutional level, the principles of gender equality are embedded in Articles 14, 15, and 16, which guarantee equality before the law and prohibit discrimination on the grounds of Grievance. These provisions provide the legal foundation for gender-sensitive policymaking and enable the state to adopt affirmative measures to promote gender justice. In addition, Directive Principles of State Policy encourage the state to ensure equal pay for equal work and protect women from exploitation. From a legislative perspective, India has enacted several laws to safeguard gender equality, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), Grievance of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013), Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), and the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017). These laws aim to address structural violence, workplace discrimination, and reproductive rights, thereby strengthening women's social and economic participation. Policy initiatives and development programs further reflect India's gender equality agenda. National-level schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, National Health Mission, and National Policy for Skill Development incorporate gender-specific components to improve women's access to education, health, and livelihood opportunities. Gender-responsive budgeting, introduced

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in 2005–06, represents a significant policy tool for integrating gender concerns into fiscal planning and public expenditure. Moreover, examining these public policies allows for a critical assessment of their effectiveness, reach, and implementation challenges. Despite progressive policy frameworks, gaps persist due to regional disparities, socio-cultural norms, administrative capacity constraints, and limited awareness among beneficiaries. An analytical examination helps identify these gaps and provides insights into how gender-competent policies can be strengthened to achieve substantive equality rather than formal equality alone.

In sum, examining India's public policies on gender equality provides a comprehensive understanding of the institutional mechanisms, legal safeguards, and development strategies aimed at reducing gender disparities. Such an examination is crucial for evaluating policy coherence, implementation outcomes, and future directions for achieving gender justice and inclusive national development.

4. Understanding gender equality in relation to women's economic participation and opportunities is central to assessing inclusive and sustainable development. Economic participation refers to women's involvement in the labor force, access to employment, entrepreneurship, income generation, and decision-making within economic institutions. Examining this dimension provides insights into the extent to which gender equality is realized beyond legal provisions and reflected in actual economic outcomes. Despite significant policy interventions, women's participation in India's economy remains constrained by structural and socio-cultural barriers. Gender disparities persist in labor force participation rates, wage equality, access to productive resources, and representation in formal and high-growth sectors. Factors such as unequal access to education and skills, the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, occupational segregation, and workplace discrimination limit women's economic opportunities. Analyzing these aspects helps in understanding the gap between formal gender equality and substantive economic empowerment. Moreover, women's economic participation is closely linked to broader development outcomes, including poverty reduction, household well-being, and national economic growth. Studies suggest that increased female labor force participation contributes to higher productivity, improved human capital formation, and intergenerational benefits. Therefore, assessing women's share in economic opportunities is not only a gender equity concern but also a critical economic imperative. This objective also involves examining institutional mechanisms and policy measures aimed at enhancing women's economic inclusion. Initiatives such as skill development programs, self-help groups, microfinance, women-centric entrepreneurship schemes, and labor market reforms seek to expand women's access to economic resources. Evaluating their reach and effectiveness provides a clearer picture of how far economic policies have succeeded in promoting gender equality.

In conclusion, knowing the status of gender equality and women's share in economic participation and opportunity enables a comprehensive assessment of gender-responsive development. It highlights existing inequalities, identifies policy gaps, and underscores the need for gender-competent economic policies that promote equal access, fair wages, decent work, and sustainable livelihoods for women.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The study reveals that gender-competent public policies play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality and inclusive development in India; however, significant gaps persist between policy intent and outcomes. The major findings derived from the four objectives are summarized as follows.

1. First, the analysis highlights that gender-competent public policies are essential for addressing structural and intersectional gender inequalities. Policies that incorporate gender perspectives demonstrate greater responsiveness to differential needs and reduce the risk of reinforcing existing disparities. Nevertheless, gender considerations are often treated as add-on components rather than as integral elements of policy design and implementation.
2. Second, with regard to gender mainstreaming in the national development process, the findings indicate that India has made institutional progress through constitutional guarantees, gender-responsive budgeting, and sector-specific interventions. Despite these advances, gender mainstreaming remains uneven across sectors and levels of governance. Limited use of gender-disaggregated data, weak monitoring mechanisms, and inadequate institutional capacity hinder effective mainstreaming.
3. Third, the examination of public policies on gender equality shows that India possesses a comprehensive legal and policy framework aimed at promoting women's rights and protection. While landmark legislations and flagship schemes have improved access to education, health, and social protection, their impact is constrained by implementation challenges, regional disparities, and socio-cultural norms that continue to restrict gender equality in practice.
4. Fourth, the assessment of gender equality in economic participation and opportunity reveals persistent gender gaps in labor force participation, wage equality, and access to productive resources. Although policies promoting skill development, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion have created new opportunities for women, unpaid care work, occupational segregation, and workplace discrimination continue to limit women's full economic inclusion.

Overall, the findings suggest that while India has made notable progress in establishing gender-sensitive policy frameworks, the transition from formal equality to substantive gender equality remains incomplete. Strengthening gender mainstreaming, improving policy implementation, enhancing institutional accountability, and addressing deep-rooted socio-

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economic barriers are critical for ensuring that public policies translate into meaningful and sustainable gender equality outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that gender-competent public policies are fundamental to achieving gender equality and inclusive national development in India. While the country has developed a robust constitutional, legal, and policy framework to promote gender justice, the realization of substantive equality remains uneven and incomplete. The findings demonstrate that policies framed without a comprehensive gender perspective risk reinforcing existing social and economic inequalities.

Gender mainstreaming has emerged as a crucial strategy within the national development process; however, its implementation varies significantly across sectors and levels of governance. Although institutional mechanisms such as gender-responsive budgeting and women-centric development schemes indicate policy commitment, limitations in administrative capacity, monitoring, and gender-disaggregated data weaken their effectiveness. As a result, gender concerns often remain peripheral rather than central to development planning.

The examination of public policies on gender equality reveals that despite progressive legislations and welfare initiatives, deep-rooted socio-cultural norms, regional disparities, and implementation gaps continue to constrain policy outcomes. These challenges are particularly evident in the sphere of economic participation, where women remain underrepresented in the labor force and face persistent wage gaps, occupational segregation, and disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities.

Overall, the study emphasizes that achieving gender equality requires moving beyond symbolic policy measures towards transformative, gender-competent governance. Strengthening institutional accountability, ensuring effective policy implementation, and addressing structural barriers are essential for translating policy commitments into tangible outcomes. A sustained and integrated approach to gender mainstreaming is therefore imperative for fostering equitable economic participation, social justice, and sustainable development in India.

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