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Policies and Legislation for Indian Women Leaders

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This chapter focuses on policies and legislation enacted by the Government of India (GoI) for women and their implications for women's leadership in India. Given the vastness and diversity of India and stereotypes that have been embedded in local cultures across millennia, waiting for society to change and empower women would be a fantasy. One way to influence society to fast forward such impact is through governmental policies and legislation.

We examined documents from the GoI, scholarly articles in the field, and analytical reports by various national and international commissions. This chapter examines legislation and policies from Independence (1947) to around 1975 and then post 1975 when the focus shifted strongly toward women's welfare. It also looks at selected schemes implemented at

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both the Union and state government levels in India that seek to empower women economically at grassroots levels and provide them with support toward living a life with dignity and security. We conclude with broad implications of these policies and schemes and make recommendations for additional government actions needed.

Though the GoI has promulgated equality for women since Independence and the late 1970s brought an era of empowerment for women leaders with the United Nation's declaration of the Year of Women and the Mexico Plan (UN's first world conference on the status of women in 1975), progress on this front has been slow. An indicator of this slow progress is that the ratio of women to men increased to only 945:1000 in 2017 from 930:1000 in 1971. Though the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the constitution, and there is the precedence of the dominant Hindu culture empowering women even as far back as the Vedic times (Alterkar, 1956), women's empowerment has not been a priority in modern times.

The plethora of policies and laws going back a century shows that, even if legislation exists, society moves at a very slow pace. In addition to equality, the Constitution also empowers states to create measures for positive discrimination for women (achieved via quotas or affirmative actions). Its aims are to ensure that the focus is on results and equality is achieved (Norris, 2001). More than 30 acts and laws have been enacted in the past century relating to women. The focus of these laws has been on positive discrimination and prevention, such as the Sati (Prevention) Act of 1987 or the Equal Remuneration Act 1976.

The Constitution also imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce all practices derogatory to the dignity of women: "to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women" (Article 51A(e)). While India has made progress in gender-related areas, with life expectancy for women having increased from 31.6 years in 1951 to 69.9 years (World Health Organization—WHO, 2015) and literacy rates having gone from 38.19% in 1951 to 65.46% as per the Census Survey 2011, the gap between men and women in these two areas still remains wide (Mathews, 2001).

Legislation and Policies by the Union Government of India

Prior to Independence, policies enacted to empower women focused on giving women basic rights. These laws included the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 that allowed women to remarry after their husband's death and the Native Marriage Act in 1872 that allowed inter-caste marriage to be valid and disallowed polygamy. The Hindu Women's Right to Property Acts in 1929 and 1937 were aimed at making widows economically independent. As in so many areas in India, however, the execution of these laws has not always been good.

In 1947, after India received independence from the British, several laws were enacted covering marriage and inheritance. These include the Special Marriage Act of 1954 and the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 that codified the rules of marriage and also covered divorce and separation (amended in 1966), the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 that gave women the right to inherit equally, and the Married Women Property Act of 1974. Other acts have been the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971, and the Maternity Benefits Act, 1961, amended in 2017.

The Minimum Wages Act was passed in 1948. In addition, the GoI introduced labor laws to ensure humane conditions, maternity benefits, and laws to end exploitation of women and children against immoral trafficking in 1956, updated in 1986. To improve opportunities for women, the GoI also formulated policies for social and economic development for women to participate effectively in society. Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Indian Constitution encourage equality in various spheres in society. Article 15, Section 3, prohibits discrimination and enables the state to offer positive discrimination in favor of women.

India adopted constitutional privileges, fundamental rights, and directive policies as focused measures for neutralizing the cumulative socio-economic, political, and educational disadvantages that have been faced by Indian women as an initial step toward women's empowerment. India ratified various international conventions committed to securing equal rights for women, key among them being the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Amongst Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

In 1974, the Minister of Welfare and Education in India commissioned researchers to determine the status of women under Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. The study (Committee on the Status of Women in India, published in the Towards Equality Report, 1974) found that there was a huge gap in implementation of laws and policies and large numbers of women were not impacted by these laws, especially those in rural India, with only those in urban India impacted (Majumdar, Sharma, & Sujaya, 1974).

A turnaround year for Indian women was 1975. The first status report on women in India was submitted by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) on January 1, 1975, to the Ministry for Education and Social Welfare, GoI. This was also the year when the United Nations (UN) heralded the first ever International Women's Year. Ironically, the same year when India was trying to understand the status of women in the post-Independence era, India's first woman prime minister, Indira Gandhi, declared an emergency, suspending all fundamental rights accorded to Indian citizens under the Constitution. It was ironic as, while the CSWI in its report highlighted that, even after two decades of Independence, there was persistent disparity in the status accorded to women in India in terms of constitutional, legal, and administrative provisions, there was a declaration of an emergency by an Indian women leader, the highest level of empowerment (administrative and legal) reflected by an Indian woman, which earned her the title of the Iron Lady of India. This position, held by a woman, was not conceivable in a country known for gender disparity.

By the middle of the 1970s, the National Plan for Women was adopted, and it became the main treatise for women until 1988 when the National Perspective Plan for Women was formulated. The Minister of State for Women, Youth Affairs, and Sport, Margaret Alva, spearheaded this plan and made over 350 recommendations covering "a uniform civil code, property rights to women, reservation of seats for women in elected bodies, banning of sex-determination tests, and making harassment of wives for dowry as a ground for seeking divorce" (National Perspective Plan 1988). Furthermore, coming under pressure to become a part of the global economy, the Indian government ratified the Mexico Plan for Action in 1975 for empowering women.

In addition to legislation, the GoI created policies and autonomous bodies that were based on the National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001, and its updated draft of 2016 with recommendations for the future. These autonomous bodies include the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD); the National Commission for Women (NCW), whose agenda is to recommend legislation after reviewing constitutional and legal protections and advise the government on policies for women; and the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB), whose mission is to build capacity and empower women and raise awareness of their legal rights. These boards have the power to create policy and make suggestions for empowering women.

Government of India: Five-Year Plans

India embarked on Five-Year Plans for a variety of reasons. One reason relevant for this chapter was that the GoI needed to intervene to achieve socially desirable objectives with its resources. As India was a young country, the Five-Year Plans were a way to achieve goals systematically.

The First Five-Year Plan focused on the welfare of women, while, in the second, *mahila mandals* (women's groups) at the grassroots level were created for the development of women. The next two plans focused on education. In the fifth plan, training of women who needed income and protection was emphasized. In the sixth plan, the focus shifted from welfare to development to give women access to resources. The seventh plan focused on softer skills, such as inculcating self-confidence in women. In the Eighth Five-Year Plan, women's empowerment was included as one of the primary goals for the country. The ninth plan earmarked over 30% of funds for women-focused programs. By the tenth plan, suggestions on the national policy of empowerment of women were incorporated. The 11th and 12th plans also focused on inclusive growth for women. The current plan focuses on *beti bachao* (save the girl child) and special benefits in terms of job quotas for single women.

Despite this legislation, even in the government there were instances when there was a flagrant reversal of rules, such as in June 1970 when the Chief Minister (CM) of Uttar Pradesh (UP) (Shri Chaudhary Charan Singh) asked the government not to have women in the IAS—Indian

Administrative Service (the prestigious branch of bureaucrats of the government)—and if they insisted, then they should not send any to his state (Sharma, Hussain, & Saharya, 1984). The government did not send any woman to the UP cadre while Charan Singh was the CM, which lasted eight months in 1970. Ironically, India's Prime Minister at that point was a woman, and three years earlier, UP had a woman CM.

Special Focus on Women and Child Development by the Government of India

In 2006, the GoI established a separate department termed the MWCD with a specific focus on holistic development of women and children through the formulation of plans, policies, and enactment/amendment of legislation to further the advancement of women and children. With specific reference to women, the ministry coordinates various schemes across different government departments to promote social and economic empowerment, mainstreaming gender concerns, and facilitating legislation that empowers women to live with dignity, contributing as equal partners in an environment free of violence and discrimination. A summary of some important schemes being undertaken at central (Union GoI) and state (under aegis of GoI) levels is given below.

***Swavalamban* [Self-Reliance]**

The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), in conjunction with a number of ministries under the GoI coordinated by the MWCD, launched this scheme in 1982. The agency provided support for this scheme until 1997; thereafter, the GoI has been running it on its own funds. The main objective of this scheme is to provide training and skills to women from poor and needy families or marginalized/deprived sections of the society (scheduled caste or scheduled tribes/minorities), enabling them to avail employment or be self-employed on a sustainable basis and to support themselves and even to support their families in difficult circumstances. From 2006, this specific scheme has been transferred to state governments and is being run as a state-sponsored scheme for effective implementation, evaluation, and monitoring.

Support for Training and Employment Programs for Women (STEP)

India faces an issue with low women workforce participation. NSSO (National Sample Survey Office) 2011–2012 data depicted a significant reduction in the women labor force participation rate from 33.3% in 2009–2010 to 25.3% in 2011–2012 in rural areas and from 16.6% in 2009–2010 to 14.7% in 2011–2012 in urban areas for women between the ages of 15 and 24 years (Kapsos, Silberman, & Bourmpoula, 2014).

The STEP scheme is a central sectoral scheme that was implemented in 1986–1987 and has since then been addressing occupational aspirations of poor women who do not have the provision of undergoing formal skill training. The objectives of the scheme are to provide skills that give employability to women from poor and marginalized sections of the society and to provide competencies and skills that enable such women to be self-employed/entrepreneurs. The competencies and skills imparted under STEP are generally related to traditional trades in the informal sector. The emphasis is to increase the self-employability of such women by providing assistance through various action-oriented projects. Some of the sectors in which STEP trains poor and marginalized women are agriculture, horticulture, food processing, handlooms, handicrafts, gems and jewelry making, travel and tourism, hospitality, computer and IT services, and so on.

Swa-Shakti [Self-Power]

To achieve the objective of women's empowerment, the GoI, in conjunction with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank, launched this special scheme in October 1999 culminating successfully in 2005. The primary objective of this scheme was to bring about socio-economic development of women by empowering women's self-help groups (SHGs) through micro-credit and income-generation activities with community-based interventions and support. The scheme aimed at inculcating savings and credit habits among women in rural areas, providing training for vocational skills, and being a converging point for health, nutrition, and sanitation activities. It was implemented in 57

districts, creating 17,000 SHGs and covering about 2 million women in rural areas and small towns of India.

***Swayamsiddha* [Self-Reliant]**

This scheme was launched by the GoI in 2001 as an Integrated Women's Empowerment Program with an objective to empower women both socially and economically, allowing them to be self-reliant and live their lives with dignity. The program not only stressed access to micro-credit for women, but also emphasized educating women about their status, rights, and privileges, while making them aware of women's health, nutrition, education, sanitation, and hygiene. The scheme was implemented in 650 blocks across the country, creating 67,000 women SHGs and benefiting about 9 million women in rural areas. The scheme replaced the earlier *Mahila Yojana* [Women Scheme] and culminated in 2007.

***Mahila E-Haat* [Women E-Marketplace]**

This bilingual portal was launched in 2016 by MWCD as a unique online direct marketing platform supporting women entrepreneurs/SHGs and non-government organizations (NGOs) in showcasing their products/services to vendors/buyers. This portal leverages technology in connecting vendors and suppliers directly through this unique platform, thus eliminating third parties in the middle and enhancing business efficiency for women entrepreneurs.

***Beti* [Girl Child] *Bachao Beti Padhao* [Save the Girl Child and Support Her Education]**

India faces declining child sex ratio (CSR), defined as the number of girls per 1000 boys. As per the Census survey 2011, the CSR stood at 940 (average across states and union territories), indicating a major cause of women's disempowerment in the country, as there is ongoing social discrimination of girls in the country by selective elimination

of girls through socially deplorable practices like abortion of female fetuses. Keeping in mind this reducing CSR, the GoI with the Ministry of Family Welfare, the MWCD, and the Ministry of Human Resource Development implemented this specific scheme as a joint effort aimed at survival, protection, and empowerment of girls. The objectives of the scheme are prevention of gender-biased selective sex elimination (abortion of female fetuses), ensuring survival and protection of girls, ensuring education, and participation of girls in the workforce. This scheme is being implemented on a war footing as a national campaign across 100 districts (including states and union territories) low in CSR by the GoI.

Selected State Government-Sponsored Schemes

In this section, we outline some specific schemes that have been conceptualized and implemented by various state governments in India under the state sponsorship budget allocated for the development of women under each state government. It may be noted that state governments in India are operationally responsible for running all central government schemes (GoI schemes) at their state levels; however, they also have the power to sponsor and implement specific schemes that do not duplicate central schemes, yet seek to address core issue of women and child development through state-level budget allocations.

Kerala: Kerala State Women's Development Corporation (KSWDC) Career Orientation Programs

A finishing school termed REACH (Resource Enhancement Academy for Career Heights) was initiated in 2009, empowering young women to fine tune their life-skills, ignite their passion, and build their confidence to pursue professional career opportunities. The program has been immensely successful in building mature women professionals with placement at reputed organizations across the state. Kerala State Women's

Development Corporation (KSWDC), in collaboration with the NIIT (National Institute of Information Technology), has trained about 1,016 graduate women in over 40 colleges since 2011 in certificate courses related to Information Technology (PC and hardware maintenance, and BPO—business process outsourcing services). Currently, a postgraduate course in Banking Operations is being run for career training of banking professionals.

KSWDC *Sandesh* (Communication and Network) One: Social Enterprises Network Scheme

Launched in 2015, the scheme named *Sandesh* is a unique social entrepreneurship development program based on the public-private-partnership (PPP) model that envisages creation of women entrepreneurs in all 1000 local bodies of the state and a rural access point for developmental solutions by setting up of a Sandesh One Centre in each local body. The selected women entrepreneurs undergo a four-month training program by IIMA (Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad) with an infrastructure provided by Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS) focused on developing their entrepreneurship skills, knowledge management capabilities, and other related aspects.

Karnataka: *Stree Shakti* [Women Empowerment] Scheme

Launched in 2000–2001, the objective of this scheme is to empower rural women by making them self-reliant through a habit of saving and proper utilization of financial resources. The scheme creates SHGs in rural areas, engaging rural women in income-generation activities, and improving their lives through training programs on gender issues, leadership, communication skills, bookkeeping, and credit management. The scheme to date has organized 2 million rural women under SHGs with savings of approximately 72 million Indian rupees through these members.

Women's Financial Assistance Schemes

Various schemes have been launched since 2001–2002 that provide financial assistance in the form of fees, scholarships, and hostel fees to women from the lower strata of the society for pursuing job-oriented or skills-development short-term courses. There have been successive modifications in objectives aimed at the welfare and empowerment of such women especially for law training.

Gujarat: Gujarat Women Economic Development Corporation (GWEDC)

The Gujarat Women Economic Development Corporation (GWEDC), an autonomous entity under the Government of Gujarat, was established in 1981 with an objective of creating awareness, providing skills development, encouraging self-employment for women, and marketing of goods/services produced/provided by women entrepreneurs in the state of Gujarat. It provides financial assistance for 217 economic activities, including vocational training and marketing support through exhibition-cum-sales for women SHGs and entrepreneurs.

Goa: Incentive to Women Entrepreneurs Scheme

This scheme was launched by the government of Goa in 2008 to encourage women to start their own industry for self-employment. The scheme provides a local employment subsidy, an interest subsidy, and benefits under special capital contribution schemes of the Government of Goa. Eligibility is for industries with 100% women ownership or with at least 51% partnership in a business where the other 49% is not held by a husband, father, brother, or son.

Puducherry (Union Territory): Women Entrepreneur Schemes

The Government of Puducherry runs two schemes for women entrepreneurs: *Mahila Udyam Nidhi* and *Magalir Udavi*. *Mahila Udyam Nidhi* provides a term loan of 65% and a seed capital of 25% of the project cost. *Magalir Udavi* is a scheme for project costs not exceeding INR 0.2 million in which a term loan covers 75% of the project cost.

Autonomous Bodies Under MWCD

We have detailed here some autonomous bodies that fall under the aegis of MWCD that support economic empowerment of women and their development for self-employed leadership positions.

National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW): Autonomous Body Under Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), GoI

This Mission was formally launched on International Women's Day (March 8) 2010 by MWCD, GoI. The Mission acts as the main agency with a mandate to strengthen inter-sectoral convergence, facilitating the process of coordinating all women's welfare and socio-economic development schemes across different ministries and departments. It has been christened as *Mission Poorna Shakti* [Mission for Total Empowerment], acting as a single resource and service center for all programs run under the aegis of central ministries for development of women.

Schemes and Programs by NMEW

The schemes and programs of the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) are based on the National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001. There are different domain areas that NMEW monitors

under its inter-sectoral approach in achieving social empowerment, economic empowerment, and gender equality in the country:

- Poverty alleviation and economic empowerment of women
- Social empowerment and education
- Health and nutrition
- Gender rights, gender-based violence, and law enforcement
- Gender budgeting (preparing budgets based on gender sensitivity), gender mainstreaming, and gender auditing
- Empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups and women in difficult circumstances

The GoI has set up *Poorna Shakti Kendras* [Total Empowerment Centers] as a focal action center for women at the grassroots level (rural women) who may have easy access to different schemes and programs being run for their benefit, livelihood support, and empowerment. These centers generate information and provide awareness of legal rights and entitlements, while also providing training and capacity building for leadership development for self-sustenance and economic empowerment.

Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK): Autonomous Body Under MWCD, GoI

RMK was established in 1993 as an autonomous body under MWCD with a clear mandate to work toward socio-economic empowerment of women. RMK operates as a central facilitation agency that provides loans to intermediary micro-finance organizations (operated by NGOs) that further lend to women SHGs for capacity development of poor and marginalized women. RMK thus provides loans to women in the informal sector (a sector that is unorganized with easy entry, small scale of operations, cash based, with a lack of formal employer-employee relationships like home-based work or street vendors) through intermediaries with backward and forward linkages, enabling micro-credit without collateral and in a hassle-free manner for income-generation activities. RMK currently also operates

a special package for poor and marginalized women from the northeastern region of India, enabling intermediaries (voluntary agencies) to make easy credit facilities available, in line with the GoI's focus on development of the northeastern region. RMK provides various types of credit, the key being loan promotion schemes, working capital term loans, refinancing, gold loans (a major source of economic security for families in India), franchisees, housing loans, and entrepreneurship development.

Impact of the Legislation and Policies

Over the decades, while the government has enacted many policies, there has been limited focus on passing legislation that focuses on women's leadership. The National Commission for Women Act (1990) emphasized safeguards for women, but only one of its 14 sub-clauses focused on ensuring advancement of women in all spheres and on socio-economic development of women (Arya, 2016). The Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2014) encompasses prevention, prohibition, and redress action that promotes the dignity of a woman. This gives women realization of their rights to gender equality, liberty, and security for increased participation in the workforce, a step toward economic empowerment and inclusive growth (Singla & Kumar, 2014).

Has any of this produced any impact on women's participation and leadership? In the first Lok Sabha (1952–1957, the House of the people or the lower house of the bicameral Indian parliament, where representatives are directly elected), there was only 4.4% women's representation. In 2009, the 10% mark was passed for the first time since Independence (Upadhyay, 2010). The current Lok Sabha has reached the highest yet at 12.2%. So, there has been an impact, albeit small, of various policies and legislation that have been formulated and implemented by the GoI over a sustainable timeframe of 20 plus years since the deliberate focus on women's empowerment, development, welfare, and support initiated through the Eighth Five-Year Plan. The other important fact is that the number of women's contestants in the political sphere has increased 15-fold since 1957 compared to 5 times for men (Rao, 2016). The current administration has six women in cabinet positions, again the highest

so far. This is heartening, though there had been hopes with the Women Reservation Bill, 2008, mandating 33.3% women quota in parliament, passed by the Upper House of the Indian Parliament (*Rajya Sabha*) in 2010; however, the bill was never passed by the Lower House (*Lok Sabha*) and lapsed in 2014. This bill was crucial and remains a longstanding demand by women's groups in the country as a strong step needed to bring gender equality at the highest decision-making levels through active involvement of women leaders in Parliament.

Interventions by the GoI have enabled women leaders to emerge and thrive from grassroots levels to corporate/public institution levels. Though India has improved in global rankings from 114 of 142 countries in the 2014 Global Gender Gap Report to 87th of 144 in 2016; ironically, it is ranked 15th among 115 nations for political empowerment of women (as politicians). In spheres such as the Judiciary, 10% of judges are women, which is marginal but a positive trend. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (a government branch looking to decentralize governance through village councils) survey in 2008 established that, at the village council level, some states, such as Bihar, had over 50% women in *panchayats* (village councils), with the average being 37% participation of women across India. Data suggest that India today has over 1.4 million women panchayat leaders, an indicator that women are taking leadership positions at the grassroots levels. This implies that this will be beneficial in reducing gender disparity in decision-making at village council levels and encourage women from marginalized sections of the society to have better access to education, health care, sanitation, and financial empowerment (Accountability India, 2008).

The Companies Act (2013) brought in the regulatory push to have at least one woman on the board for listed companies, especially public companies with revenues of more than 3 billion or more. A further amendment by Revised Clause 49 mandated this to be done by April 2015. Implications of such a regulatory push by the GoI is being reflected in increasing participation of women at board levels; as of 2015, there was 7.7% representation of women on company boards of listed companies (Deloitte, 2015).

With the advent of technology and social media, we envision more empowerment of women through effective leveraging of technology tools

such as smartphones and applications. Policies such as Make in India aim to encourage more grassroots level women entrepreneurs, having started with a Women Village Level Entrepreneur Conference in 2015 Digital India (Muntazir, 2015); Arogya Saathi that assists women entrepreneurs in providing preventive health care at the doorstep; Skill India that aims to train women for business and entrepreneurial skills for financial empowerment; and Smart Cities promulgated by the current government with positive steps for empowering women. The Draft National Policy for Women Empowerment 2016 states that the government will review all legislation and harmonize them, making concerted efforts to implement the laws using tools of information and communication technology.

Future Legislation Needed

Specific provisions in the law that seek to outlaw marital rape is an area that is in need of legislation due to the issue of forced sex in marriage that effectively takes away the right of choice from a woman. As of now the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) provides some modicum of relief in case of even sexual aggression by the husband, but it is not a comprehensive act that addresses the pertinent issue of marital rape. In addition, there also needs to be a provision that works toward removing legal protection for military personnel (AFSPA—Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in cases of rape (Kentish, 2017; Sirnate, 2014). The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act passed by the *Rajya Sabha* (upper house) in 2016 was a welcome addition providing 26 weeks' leave for maternity; however, the same provisions of leave need to be applicable to mothers who are opting for adoption of a child under three months (Prakash & Bhide, 2017). The 2017 bill's second amendment for the right to free and compulsory education, which is still pending and which states that all students have to complete elementary education (and if they fail, they need to be provided additional instruction), needs to be passed, thus making every girl child literate. Other needed policies include encouragement for women entrepreneurship ventures with easier

access to markets and capital. There is need to monitor participation of women on governing bodies with consequences for non-fulfillment. Gender sensitization training needs to be mandated beyond what is currently done at all judicial, police, and government bodies and mandated in the private sector. Another law that needs to be enhanced is the Prevention and Protection of Women from Public Dehumanization and Stigmatization Atrocities Bill, 2014, as espoused by the NCW and the Prevention of Crimes in the Name of Honor and Tradition Bill, 2010.

In terms of empowerment, women in several states need to be acknowledged as farmers so that they have access to capital and markets and become self-sufficient. Land rights for rural women need to be improved and implemented. Some older laws, such as the Succession Act, need to be expanded to all states, including Goa. The government should change the marital property law so that both spouses have co-ownership of property acquired during the marriage (Brown & Chowdhury, 2002).

Our research on continued efforts by the GoI at various levels depicts that, while on paper policies have been formulated and legislation enacted, the major issue is with the execution of the policies in reducing gender disparity in a country with a patriarchal orientation and a society that is heavily gender skewed with abhorrent practices, such as female infanticide and selective sex elimination (abortion). Sirnate (2014) lamented the poor implementation and execution of good laws or policies in the context of the Indian legal system. She highlighted the case of self-governing community law-making bodies that operate at rural levels, the self-styled *khap panchayats* or kangaroo courts issuing dictates that challenge the laws of the land. These self-styled kangaroo courts go to the extent of meting out punishments for gang rapes or sexual assaults and even honor killing for failure to comply with the rules of the particular community; for example, punishing marriage outside of the community and elopement. In such cases, it is again women who suffer as orders by the kangaroo courts act as socially sanctioned approval for such heinous acts. Herein lies the failure of the GoI in creating legislation and policies for empowerment of women. The mechanisms of law and order are ineffective in dealing with such self-styled local courts that command political clout by caste-based voting. Caste-based voting holds considerable

influence for political parties as an entire caste may be dictated to vote for a particular political party, thus ensuring victory for the candidate belonging to the selected political party. For example, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the *Yadav* peasant-pastoral community gives preference to voting for the Samajwadi Party, led by Shri Mulayam Singh Yadav based on caste equations.

Kapur (2017) described the failed implementation of the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* scheme outlines. Despite claims by the GoI of success stories of the scheme, CAG's (Controller of Auditor General-India) report on Social, General, and Economic sectors in the states of Haryana and Punjab showed that the ratio of girls to boys has declined from 892 per 1000 boys in 2015 to 881 in 2016. The ambitious target of 100% enrollment of girls in schools has also not been achieved. The diversion of funds and lack of a reliable monitoring mechanism seem to be the root cause of this failure. Of the total amount of 430 million allocated to this scheme in the fiscal year 2016–2017, only 50 million has been correctly utilized, according to the report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development. There also seems to be an immense issue related to the coordination of the scheme among the central, state, and local government agencies, leading to several glitches and manipulation of data at each level.

The draft National Policy for Women 2016 notes that redistribution of gender roles is imperative to bring about increased participation of women in the workforce and ensure their active participation in the country's economic progress, so they can ultimately move into leadership roles. Presently, Indian women, especially those in rural areas and from marginalized sections of society, shoulder the double burden of earning for the family while taking care of unpaid family responsibilities, such as childcare and eldercare without any semblance of organized support. To ensure participation of such women at grassroots levels, to empower them as entrepreneurs, and to ensure their participation as leaders in decision-making roles, there is need for major transformation in the thought process of Indian society that should look at a girl child with dignity rather than the skewed perspective of being a burden to society (Kapsos et al., 2014). To achieve this end, the GoI needs to focus

more on increasing the literacy level of girl children and actively involve its policies and schemes related to continued education of women at both tertiary and secondary levels. Also, more focus is needed to create family-friendly work policies, such as using parental leaves instead of just maternity leaves (in line with countries such as Sweden) that enable both partners to share childcare responsibilities in both organized and unorganized sectors, thus supporting economic progression of women while managing work-life balance.

Other provisions that we expect the GoI to focus on in support of empowerment of women include acceptance of the emergence of different categories of women in society, such as single mothers, surrogate mothers, separated women, divorced mothers, and same-gender relationships (currently illegal); thereby focusing on creation of policies that seek to protect the dignity of such women, effectively availing them of security and protection against fraud and violence and ensuring their continued participation in the economic progress of the country as a formidable workforce.

Conclusion

In summary, we believe that future implications and the effects of policies and legislation for the empowerment of women can be successful only if the GoI adopts a multipronged perspective, viz., sensitize society, policy-makers, statutory bodies, and organizations about the need for gender-inclusive workplaces, not from the lens of egalitarianism but from the practical perspective of benefits that can accrue from shedding stereotypical social and organizational identities and roles; sensitizing women and counseling them to bring about a sea change in their outlook on their social roles and identities by availing more information and access to GoI policies and schemes for financial empowerment and inclusiveness; and, last, focusing on effective execution of policies/schemes in crucial areas, such as education, preventive health care, and women's security and welfare to support the steady progression and amalgamation of women in the mainstream economy and their aspirations for leadership roles.

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