SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY: EVALUATING POLICY REFORMS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to give a critical review of the policy changes that were enacted in India with the intention of increasing social justice and equality. An emphasis is placed on the effectiveness and effects of these reforms. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes are some of the disadvantaged people in India that have been the focus of the government's attempts to address historical inequalities and socioeconomic disparities via a variety of programs and regulations. These efforts have been directed towards rectifying the situation of these groups. The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which affirmative action, healthcare, education, and labour restrictions have influenced the way things have changed and how these changes have impacted people's capacity to advance in their lives. The purpose of this research is to give a comprehensive understanding of the role that these policies play in the process of developing a society that is more inclusive by analysing their successes, challenges, and limitations. In addition, the research demonstrates that new policies are required on a continuous basis in order to address the complex problems of socioeconomic inequality in India.

Keyword: Social Justice, Equality, Policy Reforms, India, Marginalized Communities

INTRODUCTION

Despite its rich cultural heritage, India has a long history of socioeconomic inequity, particularly with regard to gender. This is especially concerning. Females have long had a lesser social position than boys. This is mostly attributable to patriarchal traditions, uneven inheritance and property rights, and a dearth of educational possibilities. In spite of this, India has made significant progress in terms of empowering women in terms of their social, educational, and economic status since the country's constitution was enacted in the year 1950. Recent revisions to India's constitution and civil laws have been made with the intention of achieving gender equality and advancing the rights of females inside the country. The improvements that have taken place have made it simpler for women to achieve positions of power by concentrating on areas such as education, marriage, health, and employment. This research will investigate the constitutional changes, laws, and policies that have been adopted in this respect in order to establish the extent to which these efforts have been effective in raising the social standing of females in contemporary India. India is a country that is well-known for its cultural variety, historical riches, and rapid economic progress; nonetheless, gender inequality has lasted for a considerable amount of time in India. Women and girls have been relegated to inferior positions within families, communities, and the greater society in Indian culture for a very long time. Patriarchal values have been the dominant norm in Indian culture. The discriminatory practices that have traditionally impeded the advancement and welfare of girls in India include child

marriage, poor healthcare, limited educational possibilities, and a lack of legal protections. These are only a few instances of the negative effects that these practices have had. In spite of all of these challenges, India has achieved significant progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of girls via reforms in legislation and policy since it gained its independence.

The Indian Constitution, which was ratified in 1950 and provided comprehensive gender equality and fundamental rights for all Indian people, was the driving force behind these reforms. As a result of a number of constitutional amendments and legislative reforms, these principles have been reinforced, and the pressing needs of girls, such as access to education, freedom from child marriage, reproductive rights, and protection from violence, have been satisfied. The ever-evolving collection of civil laws and national policies, in conjunction with the Constitution's emphasis on social justice, have played a significant part in reshaping the legal environment for girls, therefore providing them with the opportunity to have a more promising future. One of the areas that these improvements have attempted to decrease is the gender gap that has existed for a long time and has placed women at a disadvantage in the educational, healthcare, professional, and family sectors of society. Although there has been a significant amount of progress made in particular areas, the transition is still in progress generally. On the journey to equality, girls continue to face a great deal of resistance, particularly in economically disadvantaged groups and rural areas, which are often characterised by more stringent cultural and social norms. With the intention of assisting in the advancement of girls' social position, the objective of this article is to take a detailed look at the ways in which the Indian Constitution and civil laws have developed over the course of time. Through an examination of the ways in which significant constitutional provisions, legislative amendments, and national initiatives have attempted to enhance the social, economic, and political standing of girls by addressing their rights and welfare, this study investigates the many methods in which these efforts have been made. The purpose of this research is to get an understanding of the continuing challenges that women in contemporary Indian society confront, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of these changes in applying them to circumstances that occur in the real world. As an example, while laws have been amended to safeguard the rights of girls, the effect of these laws is often restricted due to the deeply established societal views that exist about the roles that men and women should play in society. For example, child marriage, female infanticide, dowry, and violence based on gender are some of the additional hurdles that prohibit gender justice from being completely implemented.

OBJECTIVE

1. To Equality and Social Justice: Assessing Policy Changes in India.

2. To investigate the need of ongoing policy innovation

THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

A wide variety of academic disciplines each provide their own distinctive perspectives on the idea of social justice. The primary emphasis of the study conducted by political scientists is on organisations founded with the intention of bettering the lives of disadvantaged populations. In order to accomplish this goal, their construct and operation are investigated together. One concept of social justice in economics is the equitable allocation of material resources; however, the objective of legal philosophy is to identify and explain the rights and obligations of individuals. From an ethical perspective, philosophers evaluate whether or whether

the state provides chances for moral and material growth in a fair and equitable manner. Even in liberal and democratic societies, where disadvantaged groups continue to experience persistent injustices, the notion of social justice is essential. This is true regardless of the discrepancies that exist in discipline. There are some individuals who have a more humanistic perspective on social justice. They advocate for the elimination of discrimination and injustice, as well as the construction of a "just society" in which everyone has access to the necessities of essential life. In order to accomplish social justice, reservation, which is strongly tied to the ideas of social justice, emerges as a method that is both controversial and vital. Particularly with regard to the topic of proportionate equality, justice is a difficult problem that has continued for centuries, with differing perspectives held even by foundational thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle. Contemporary philosophers like as John Rawls and Robert Nozick are two instances of individuals whose varied perspectives contribute to the increasing of the gap between them. Comparatively, Rawls argues for distributive justice that is pushed by the state, in contrast to Nozick's capitalist focus on individual liberty and little engagement from the government. Within this complex network of concepts, reservation policy is both crucial to and the subject of intense discussion as a way of defining and achieving social justice.

This notion of natural rights, which was developed by John Locke and puts a priority on life, liberty, and property, is congruent with the concept of social justice. The argument that Nozick makes is that the government ought to have as little of a role as possible in deciding social justice. As a result, he is against programs that allocate resources to different groups. To have a complete understanding of the intricate relationship that exists between social justice and reservation policy, one must have a thorough acquaintance with the intellectual frameworks that are involved. By ensuring that all members of a society have an equal chance to acquire and enjoy personal belongings and societal advantages, distributive justice is a component of social justice that strives to guarantee that all members of a society are treated fairly. There are two primary concepts that have surfaced as a result of efforts to rectify the wrongs that have occurred in the past: the first is based on merit and equal opportunity, and the second is centred on serving needs and fostering equality. In the end, social justice is a notion that really materialises into a reality when institutions are modified in order to give equal opportunities for the development of all individuals. Due to the fact that achieving social justice is a delicate balancing act, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive investigation of a wide variety of philosophical perspectives about the subject. The natural rights doctrine developed by John Locke, which puts an emphasis on life, liberty, and property, is compatible with the idea of a society that is fair. Nevertheless, Robert Nozick puts doubt on this concept by arguing against redistributive policies that restrict individual liberties and in support of minimal government intervention. He thinks that these policies should be avoided. It is vital to have an understanding of these contrasting points of view in order to decipher the intricate web of links that exists between social fairness and provisions for reserve legislation.

A crucial component of social justice is the concept of distributive justice, which tries to achieve a more equitable distribution of a society's resources, including its money, assets, rights, and advantages. The first, which is known as the meritocratic approach, lays an emphasis on equal opportunity for all individuals regardless of their background or aptitude. The second, which is known as the need-based perspective, places an emphasis on redressing past injustices and inequity for the members of society who are the most marginalised. When it comes to reservation regulations, it is customary practice to achieve a compromise between the ideals of meritocracy and the need of redressing past wrongs. It takes the shape of a continuing

endeavour to reorganise diverse institutions in such a manner that everyone has equal access to opportunities for development and self-actualization. This is the form that it takes.

NEP 2020 towards Social Justice

The National Education strategy (NEP) 2020 is the name of the new education strategy that has been implemented by the government of India in an effort to change the educational system used by the nation. It strives to make significant reforms across the board in education, from elementary school to university, with the intention of developing students' general growth, creativity, and critical thinking. This is the purpose of the initiative. It is the goal of the new plan to raise the level of public investment in education to six percent of GDP, which is an increase from the present level of 4.5 percent. The ultimate objective of the strategy is to eliminate the achievement gap in terms of school enrolment, engagement, and learning outcomes by the year 2030. This will ensure that all kids have equal access to school and are successful in their academic endeavours. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) has recommended a number of improvements to the educational system, one of which is a commitment to social justice. The policy recognises that it is essential to ensure that everyone has the chance to get an education of a high level in order to promote inclusion, empowerment, and social justice with regard to education. The promotion of social justice is one of the major focusses of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). The objective is to eradicate gender prejudice, racial discrimination, social status, and physical ability gaps in order to develop an educational system that is fairer and more inclusive, and that addresses both structural and historical injustices. There are a lot of aspects of the NEP 2020 that demonstrate that it is serious about finding solutions to issues pertaining to social justice:

Equity and Inclusion: It is possible for us to ensure that every child, regardless of their family's financial position, gender, caste, or physical or mental disability, is able to attend school with the assistance of the National Education Program (NEP). The need of reducing barriers to participation and ensuring that impoverished and marginalised populations have equal opportunities is emphasised by this piece of writing. In addition, it is important to point out that the new National Education Policy placed an emphasis on equity and inclusion. Inclusion requires a complete reorganisation of the system in order to give a wide variety of educational opportunities (including curriculum, pedagogy, and leisure activities, among other things) in the framework of elementary or secondary education or higher education. It is claimed that the purpose of the policy is to protect students from the possibility of being excluded from educational opportunities owing to circumstances such as their position as members of a racial or ethnic minority, their disability, or issues linked to language acquisition. It is the language that we use that determines not just our power and legitimacy but also our capacity to make sense of the world around us. NEP 2020 has set a goal for all persons to be able to speak many languages fluently at a number of different educational levels.

Holistic Development: The fundamental focus of the strategy is on holistic development, which includes not just academic ability but also competencies in problem-solving, critical thinking, and life skills. With the support of this approach, the objective is to assist students from all walks of life in maturing into whole individuals who are capable of having a beneficial effect on the world.

Multilingualism: The National school Policy (NEP) places a strong emphasis on the significance of teaching in the student's native tongue or the language spoken in the community as a medium of instruction throughout the early stages of school. By aiding in the process of overcoming linguistic barriers, this strategy

ensures that students who come from a wide range of linguistic origins have equal access to educational opportunities.

Reducing Disparities: By reorganising the educational system into a framework consisting of 5+3+3+4, the National Education Policy (NEP) is working to ensure that all students have a strong foundation. This policy, which also helps reduce the number of kids who drop out of school, will ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic standing, will have access to an education of the highest possible quality.

Vocational Education: The program lays an emphasis on vocational education and skill development with the goal of bridging the economic inequalities that often lead to limited opportunities for certain groups of people. The National Education Program is striving to include vocational education into the curriculum in order to assist students who are not interested in attending college in being able to discover alternative possibilities. It is expected that this would make them more marketable to employment opportunities.

Teacher Training and Quality: Achieving social justice is dependent on educators who are both educated and motivated, which is something that the NEP acknowledges. The purpose of conducting frequent assessments and engaging in continuing professional development is to raise the standard for educators in order to ensure that all children have access to top-notch educational opportunities.

Reservation and Affirmative Action: The National Education Policy recognises the need of preserving support for affirmative action programs such as reservations in order to ensure that groups who have been historically oppressed and under-represented have equal access to higher education and other opportunities.

Technology and Access: It would be much simpler for students living in rural and economically disadvantaged areas to have access to educational resources if the National Education Policy (NEP) recommended using technology into the classroom setting.

Flexibility in Education: The National Education Program (NEP) takes a multidisciplinary approach to teaching in order to achieve its aim of improving access to higher education and equity. Additionally, the NEP provides several exit options from higher education in order to accommodate a wide range of interests and abilities.

Equitable Access: The idea is predicated on the principle that education should be provided to all members of society. To ensure that impoverished and disadvantaged people have the opportunity to get an education, it has been claimed that its objective is to provide a level playing field between urban and rural areas.

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: The NEP 2020 places a high priority on the development of fundamental skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. By doing so, we can ensure that all students, especially those who come from households with modest incomes, have access to the resources they need in order to realise their potential in higher education.

Mother Tongue-Based Education: According to the regulation, pupils should be taught in either their mother tongue or another language spoken in the area until they reach the fifth grade at the very least. The use of this strategy, which acknowledges the existence of linguistic diversity, makes the classroom environment more inviting, particularly for groups who are under-represented.

Special Education and Early Intervention: The identification and assistance of children who have special needs as quickly as possible is a priority, and this policy makes it very obvious that this is the case. Specifically, it emphasises the need of providing them with the appropriate assistance and resources in order to facilitate their entire growth and development.

Vocational Education and Skills: The National Education Policy recognises the significance of vocational education in the process of attaining social justice. Every student, regardless of their socioeconomic background, has the potential to reap the benefits of greater employability and reduced economic inequality when vocational education is a fundamental component of the educational curriculum.

NEP 2020 and Constitutional, Social Justice Ideals: A Contradiction

A great number of individuals and groups have expressed their opposition of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, noting the possibility that it may be in breach with constitutional law and principles of social justice. There will be a variety of interpretations of what the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) implies, despite the fact that it intends to bring about structural changes in the educational system. This practice may limit the educational opportunities available to students who are not native speakers of these languages, which would result in a reduction in India's linguistic diversity, according to those who are opposed to the current policy of educating students only in their native or regional languages up until the fifth grade. Concerns have been raised by a few individuals over the impact that the NEP will have on affirmative action and reservations. Concerns have been raised over the consequences of the anticipated revisions, which might potentially weaken India's long-standing commitment to social justice. Others argue that vocational training may increase economic and social inequities if it is not handled properly and with prudence. This is despite the fact that many people believe that vocational training is an excellent method to polish skills that are marketable. Furthermore, some people have pointed out that the policy's emphasis on institution autonomy and self-regulation may result in private schools being the dominant force in the market, while at the same time excluding low-income and minority groups from the educational systems. Despite the fact that technology integration is a significant component of the National Economic Policy (NEP), there are some people who are concerned about India's digital divide. It is possible that students who do not have access to essential resources will be at a disadvantage if they are obliged to depend heavily on technology. Concerns have also been raised by those who are opposed to the program over the possibility that the policy's concentration on standardised testing and a consistent national assessment system may result in the students' diverse language and cultural backgrounds, as well as their preferred ways of learning, being ignored.

It is important to keep in mind that there are often a great number of distinct perspectives on policy, and that whenever it comes to significant policy shifts, individuals frequently have contrasting viewpoints. Some of these concerns have been addressed by the government and MPs, who have provided further information and emphasised that the implementation of the NEP will be inclusive and flexible. If we want our policies to more closely reflect constitutional ideas and social justice principles, we need to conduct interactions with the public, incorporate stakeholders, and collect their opinions on a regular basis. In order to ensure that policies are implemented in a manner that is both fair and balanced, it is recommended that individuals and organisations take part in constructive conversation, study policy documents, and offer feedback.

CONCLUSION

India has made significant strides towards social justice and equality, despite the fact that it has implemented a number of policy reforms; yet, there are still challenges to overcome in order to attain the outcomes that are sought. It has been made easier for underprivileged people to have access to healthcare via the implementation of affirmative action, healthcare reforms, and educational reforms; yet, there are still barriers that stand in the way, such as economic disparities, social stigma, and systemic racism. In addition, the effectiveness of labour rules has been diminished as a result of shifts in the socioeconomic dynamics and gaps in the application of these legislation. For the purpose of constructing a society that is more welcoming to people of all backgrounds, there must be ongoing policy innovation, stringent monitoring, and the active participation of civil society in order to confront emerging forms of inequality. In order to achieve genuine social justice and the promotion of equitable development for all individuals, it is necessary to strengthen these particular improvements.

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