Public Policy for the Marginalized

Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life, which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. - B. R. Ambedkar

Often regarded as the world's largest democracy, India is home to rich diversity of cultures, languages, religions, and communities. However, beneath its democratic identity lies a history of social stratification leading to the *marginalization* of various communities along linguistic, gender, caste, and religious lines. Marginality, at its core, is a relative concept that considers social hierarchy and the rules governing access to societal resources (Von Braun & Gatzweiler, 2014). Women, Children, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, religious minorities, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+, sanitation workers, and migrant labourers, continue to endure systemic discrimination that entrenches their marginalized status in society.

Understanding the subtleties of marginalization and rectifying historical injustices, brings the concept of *public policy* into play. **Thomas Dye** articulates the importance of analyzing historical power structures by asking "what governments do, why they do it, and what difference it makes." India's policies are shaped by social, political, and economic factors, addressing power imbalances. These policies support marginalized communities through targeted interventions, affirmative action, legal protections, and economic aid, ensuring they can attain basic human dignity. Public policies in India often fall into substantive, distributive, or regulatory categories, reflecting the country's diverse needs and priorities.

This essay evaluates India's public policy for marginalized communities, highlighting its achievements and shortcomings while proposing reforms for a fairer future.

The Historical & Constitutional Framework of Inclusion

In his historic "*Tryst with Destiny*" speech, Jawaharlal Nehru expressed aspirations for a newly independent India. He emphasized tackling poverty, ignorance, and disease, and advocated for just social, economic, and political systems to ensure a fulfilling life for all.

Before and during British rule, India was marked by ethnic, linguistic, religious, class, and caste differences as well as cultural problems of superstition and segregation. Social reformers like **Raja Ram Mohan Roy**, **Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar**, **Savitribai Phule**, and **Jyotiba Phule** advocated for social justice and equality and fought for marginalized groups' rights.

Post-independence, India battled a depleted treasury, poverty, illiteracy, poor health yet India's leaders were hopeful about the future. They envisioned an India that was educated, healthy, free of caste and religious discrimination. **Gandhi** valued selfless nationalism. **Ambedkar** sought equality and social justice through affirmative action. **Sarojini Naidu** advocated peace and harmony for national salvation.

The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, reflected these aspirations to establish an egalitarian society by addressing historical injustices. **Fundamental Rights** prohibit discrimination, promote affirmative action, ensure equal opportunity, abolish untouchability, protect minorities, promote weaker sections' educational and economic interests, and prohibit child labour. **Directive Principles** emphasize citizen welfare. India implemented various public policies to promote social
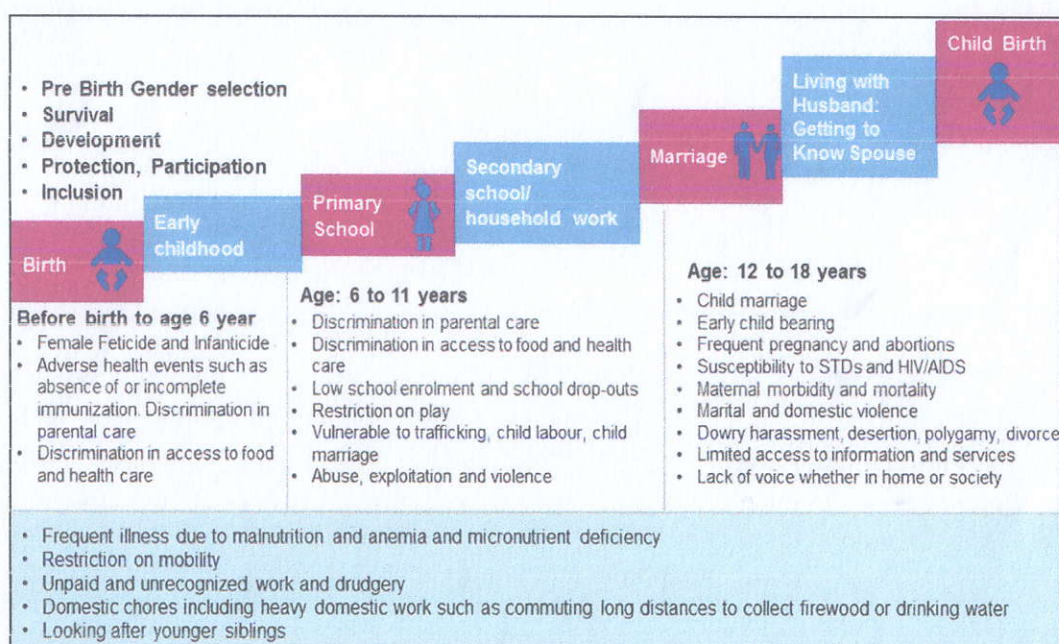
justice. It pursued planned economic development and transitioned to a market-driven economy following LPG reforms, empowering local governments. Now, **NITI Aayog** fosters cooperative federalism and inclusive policy-making.

Despite efforts, poverty, limited healthcare, employment and social discrimination persist, hindering socio-economic progress. The next section will assess public policies for marginalized groups in India.

Women

"When the women are empowered, society with stability gets assured." - Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Women have a pivotal role in advancing progress. Historically, women were subjected to practices like Ṣati, child marriage, dowry system reflecting deep-seated gender inequalities. Even today, societal preferences for male children continues and the **marginalization of women** begins at birth. Unequal access to nutrition and healthcare sets them on a path of disadvantage from their earliest moments as seen in the chart.

Women often lack control over their finances and face significant threats from gender-based violence in various forms. Insufficient schooling and traditional norms trap women within restrictive roles, raising financial dependence on men and limiting their autonomy over family planning decisions. Gender inequality affects all women, but experiences of marginalization vary due to *intersectionality*, which considers combined factors like caste, class, and religion.

The Indian Constitution grants women several rights ensuring equality- Legal equality through **Articles 14, 15, and 16**, economic and social rights under **Articles 39 and 42**, political representation in local governance via reservations under **Articles 243D and 243T**, promotion of equal justice opportunities, and legislative support against discrimination and violence.

<u>Gender inequality persists in India despite constitutional guarantees and legal protections, requiring varied public policy interventions to empower women.</u>

Public Policies for Women

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
REGULATORY POLICIES	The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 & 2018	Legal frameworks & punishments for crimes against women, including sexual assault & harassment
	The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	Ban dowry in marriages to combat violence and discrimination against women.
	The code on wages, 2019	Ensures equal pay for women and men in similar work.
	The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013	Address workplace sexual harassment of women, with a redressal mechanism for related complaints.
	The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005	Grants daughters property rights in joint families, ensuring they are beneficiaries for inheritance.

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
SUBSTANTIVE POLICIES	Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)	Emphasis on cherishing, educating, and saving for the girl child
	Ujjwala Yojana	Protect women's health by providing clean cooking fuel
	National Commission for Women (NCW)	Focuses on general welfare, advancement, development, and empowerment of women
	Swachh Bharat Mission	Construction of toilets to provide safe, private, and hygienic sanitation facilities, addressing women's dignity, safety, and health needs
	Swacch Vidyalaya Mission	Ensures each school has a functioning toilet for girls.
	Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme	Offer vocational training for non-literate, neo-literate, and school drop-outs, with women comprising 82% of the beneficiaries.

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
DISTRIBUTIVE POLICIES	MGNREGA	100-day employment guarantee for rural households
	PM Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)	Provides cash incentives for the birth of the first and second child (female)
	PM Awas Yojana	Mandates female ownership of houses
	Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Kendras	Provide women-focused infrastructure, flexible training, safe environment, female trainers, fair pay, and complaints system.
	Sambal	One-stop centers provide aid to women in need Offers critical social security & financial assistance

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
REDISTRIBUTIVE POLICIES	Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-NRLM	Empower women through SHGs, providing them with access to credit, training, and market linkages
	Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023	Increase women's representation in political leadership roles by reserving 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies
	PM Mudra Yojana	Provide financial assistance to women entrepreneurs to start or expand their businesses
	Stand-Up India	Support women entrepreneurs with credit, training, mentoring
	Pradhan Mantri Vyay Vandana Yojana (PMVVY)	Provides income security for senior citizens, especially women, through a guaranteed pension scheme

Policy Impact

Studies indicate that policies have promoted women's empowerment. **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)** showed varied impacts on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) across India, benefiting

states with skewed sex ratios, effectively addressing local challenges. BBBP contributed to improved sex ratios at birth, increasing from 918 (2014-15) to 934 (2019-20), signaling a shift in societal attitudes.It successfully boosted female student enrollment through financial incentives, scholarship.

In 2020, UNICEF, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Sambodhi highlighted positive outcomes from **Swachh Bharat Mission** showing improved sanitation- 91% of women saved time by eliminating long walks to defecation sites, 88% own a toilet, 81% have privacy for menstrual hygiene tasks, and 93% feel safer from assault. MMR dropped from 130 to 113 between 2014-2018, indicating progress in promoting safer pregnancies (NFHS-5). Jal Jeevan Mission provides tap water, reducing women's workload.

In FY 2025, the **Gender Budget** hit a record high of 6.5% of the Union Budget. In **PMAY's** second phase (2024), homes will be registered solely or jointly under women's names, aiming for 100% female ownership, up from 74% currently.
758 **OSCs** have been approved for 734 districts, aiding 5.40 lakh women as of March 2022. Around 80% of **Stand up India** scheme beneficiaries are women. **PM Mudra Yojana** spotlights women's entrepreneurship with 70% female beneficiaries.

Initiatives like the Skill India Mission, Mission Shakti, STEP, Mahila E-Haat, PMJDY, PMUY, RMK, Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme, and the National Creche Scheme aid women's economic independence, safety, security, and overall empowerment.

Policy Shortcomings

Despite policies for women, India ranks 122nd out of 191 countries on the Gender Inequality Index, indicating disparities. The 2011 census shows a literacy rate of 80.9% for men and 64.6% for women, with 20.74 crore of the 32.67 crore illiterate individuals being women. **Saakshar Bharat Scheme** aimed at improving adult female literacy has struggled with implementation.

Women's unpaid care work contributes far more to GDP (3.1%) than men (0.4%), highlighting their **dual burden.** 80% of women pause careers, with 45% doing so due to childcare. Societal biases limit women's resource accessibility; only **3%** of female entrepreneurs secured financial support for their ventures.

About 20% of Indian women live in poverty, reflecting the "*feminization of poverty*," while only 14% of landowners are women despite equal property rights laws. **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)** aims to reduce poverty through self-employment and SHGs has limited impact on women's decision-making due to male influence over finances.

In 2020, over 300,000 crimes against women were reported (NCRB). Despite the UNFPA finding that 2/3 of married Indian women experience violence and Plan International survey showing 78% face public harassment, the Union government spent only about 1/3 of allocated funds for **Mission Shakti's** safety schemes. **Women Helpline** scheme's budget decreased significantly, and district-level safety bodies remain unestablished 2 years post launch (NITI Aayog). The Delhi government also **failed** to pay the OSCs staff funded by Nirbhaya Fund for assisting distressed women, exposing a critical flaw.

Insensitivity within judiciary worsens matters as seen in a Chhattisgarh High Court ruling acquitting a man who sexually assaulted his wife, resulting in her death, undermining women's **legal protections within marriage.** This inadequacy extends to the **Supreme Court** that inconsistently changed its position 4 times on Hindu women's coparcenary rights; between 2016 and 2020 (Agarwal & Naik, 2024). Changing stances on inheritance rights, weaken legal safeguards for women.

Women's Police Stations (WPSs) do not effectively serve lower-class and caste women. In 2015, only 3.5% of domestic violence victims sought help from WPSs. Efforts to enhance women's representation through constitutional amendments have stalled, leaving initiatives like the **Women's Reservation Bill** unadopted and women underrepresented.

Policy Recommendations

India's GDP could increase by 27% ($2.9 trillion by 2025) if women had equal representation. *Women's empowerment through education and entrepreneurship leads to shared prosperity.* Public-private partnerships can be leveraged to create innovative programs that support women's entrepreneurship and skill development.

Involving women in politics brings valuable insights, leading to more effective policies. India can adopt Rwanda's **"Zipper Method"** to ensure at least 30% female representation in parliament and Bolivia's **Parity Law**, which mandates gender equality in elected bodies, achieving 50% female representation within a decade with state funding for women candidates.

Strengthening legal frameworks is vital for protecting women's rights. Tailored mental health services empower women affected by violence or discrimination. Promoting education for girls with targeted scholarships and mentorship can reduce gender gaps.

Aligning domestic measures with international agreements like **CEDAW** provides a framework for gender equality. Articles 5 and 6 focus on changing social norms and preventing trafficking. Integrating **SDG 5** into national policies promotes women's rights by establishing targets for policy-making. India must enhance compliance with **ILO** Conventions No. 100 for equal pay and No. 111 to prevent workplace discrimination, ensuring fair wages and working conditions.

Implementing skill training, wage gap regulations, fast-track courts, and awareness campaigns are key for women's empowerment and justice. Effective monitoring and evaluation of women-centric programs, with adjustments based on feedback will foster an inclusive environment.

Children

"History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children"- Nelson Mandela

As the most vulnerable segment of society, children reflect a nation's dedication to their welfare. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as **"a human being under the age of 18 years, unless the applicable law establishes the age of majority earlier."** Children comprise 39% of India's population (Census 2011), and their issues are linked to socio-economic factors. Malnutrition and inadequate early childhood education create learning gaps that hinder learning and increase school closures. Child abuse negatively impacts children's physical and psychological growth, pushing them away from education. While all children are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, orphans, refugees, child labourers, and abuse victims face heightened risks.

Children are primary victims of poverty and patriarchal norms leading to early marriages for many children, resulting in early pregnancies, social isolation and inadequate vocational training, further entrenching the cycle of poverty. Additionally, many children are forced into labor, robbing them of their childhood and potential. Such work is often detrimental to their mental, physical, social, or moral well-being.

The Constitution safeguards children's well-being: **Article 39 (f)** promotes a healthy, dignified upbringing; **Article 21A** mandates free education for ages 6-14; **Article 24** bars child labor in hazardous industries; **Article 39 (e)** requires policies against child abuse; and **Article 45** stresses early childhood education up to age six.

However, despite constitutional guarantees, challenges persist, necessitating public policies aimed at correction.

Public Policies For Children

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
REGULATORY POLICIES	The Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act (1986)	Prohibits, regulates child labor, ensuring protection for children in the workforce
	Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) (2012)	Prevent, address sexual offenses against children, ensuring their safety and justice.
	The Juvenile Justice Act Section 26 (Exploitation of Juvenile or Child Employee)	Prevent the exploitation of juveniles or child employees
	The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act	Prevent child marriage, protect children from early, forced marriages.
	National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights Act (2005)	Monitors, protects children's rights across India.
	The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act	Prevent human trafficking; sexual exploitation of children

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
SUBSTANTIVE POLICIES	Saksham Anganwadi and Mission Poshan 2.0 Scheme	Improve nutrition, overall development of children through Anganwadi centers.
	Integrated Child Development Services	Provide essential services like early childhood education, health, nutrition
	Mid-day Meal Scheme	Provides nutritious meals to school children, improving health, encouraging school attendance.
	Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan	Improves the quality of education; school infrastructure across India.
	Mission Vatsalya Scheme	Protect, rehabilitate, empower children in need of care and protection
	National Education Policy (NEP)	Equitable access to Education

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
DISTRIBUTIVE POLICIES	Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)	Encourages education, welfare of the girl child through awareness and financial incentives.
	Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana	Provide a savings scheme for the welfare of the girl child, encouraging financial security.
	National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education	Financial incentives to girls to continue their secondary education.
	Dhanalakshmi	Provide conditional cash transfers to promote education of the girl child.

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
REDISTRIBUTIVE POLICIES	POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission)	To reduce malnutrition, improve nutritional status of children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.
	PENCiL Portal	To monitor child labor, exploitation, ensuring the redistribution of resources for child protection.

Policy Impact

Saksham Anganwadi and **Mission Poshan 2.0** Scheme improved childcare centers, enhancing early childhood nutrition and lowering malnutrition(NFHS-5). **POSHAN Abhiyaan's** improved

tracking led to decreased stunting (38% to 35%) and underweight prevalence (36.4% to 29.2%) among children under five (NFHS-4, NFHS-5).

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program provides essential nutrition, healthcare, and education to children under six. The **Mid-Day Meal Scheme** serves about 12 crore children. A World Bank study found a positive association between the MDMS and increased enrollment along with reduced dropout rates. States implementing MDMS saw a 15% increase in enrollment rate.

Schemes benefiting women and families also tend to benefit children. **MGNREGS**, where 60% of beneficiaries are women, improved family nutrition, school attendance, and healthcare. Financial schemes like **PMJDY**, **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana**, and **PM-KISAN** improve household incomes.

Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) screened over 35 crore children, detecting health issues and birth defects, improving children's health. It boosts educational involvement, ensuring healthier children attend school regularly. **BBBP** improved societal attitudes towards girls through awareness campaigns and incentives like **Dhanlaxmi**, contributing to a slight improvement in the child sex ratio and female literacy rates.

Census 2011 data shows a 10% decrease in working children since 2001. According to **NEP 2020**, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for higher education reached 27.1% in 2020 (up from 26.3% in 2019). **National Scheme for Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education** (NSIGSE) improved girls' enrollment in secondary education from 60% in 2015 to 70% in 2020.

Childline India Helpline is a 24-hour toll-free service supporting distressed children in over 558 Indian cities/districts. 76 child-friendly courts and 7 Child Friendly Police Stations have been or are being established across various states, enhancing access to justice for children.

Policy Shortcomings

Criticisms persist regarding the effectiveness of policies aimed at improving children's welfare. UDISEPlus data (2023-2024) reveals that 47.44 million children are out of school, with significant numbers in each age bracket: 17.05 million (6-10 years), 7.60 million (11-13 years), 10.96 million (14-15 years), and 11.83 million (16-17 years).

Despite increased enrollment through **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**, dropout rates remain high. DISE (2019-2020) data indicates a 4.1% overall primary school dropout rate. Learning outcomes show little improvement; ASER 2020 reports that 50% of grade 5 rural children cannot read grade 2-level texts. The pandemic worsened this, with ASER revealing that 1/3rd of rural children lacked online learning access during lockdowns.

The Global Hunger Index 2023 highlights an undernourishment rate of 16.6% and an under-five mortality rate of 3.1%. Malnutrition in children perseveres despite initiatives like **Poshan Abhiyaan**, **ICDS** and **MDMS**. MDMS is criticized for providing low-quality meals negatively affecting children's health. NFHS-5 data highlights high stunting (35%), wasting (17%), and underweight (33%) rates among children under five. Vitamin deficiencies and diseases like anaemia remain prevalent among many children.

22% children live below poverty line struggling with access to education, healthcare, and quality of life. Child safety is at risk, with crimes against children rising 8.7% in 2021-2022; 'Kidnapping & Abduction' (45.5%) and violations of the **POCSO** Act are rampant. Despite **Child Labour Act** and **PENCIL Portal**, Census 2011 reported 8.1 million child labourers, but UNICEF and ILO estimate over 20 million with unreported cases.

BBBP raises awareness on gender discrimination, yet child marriage is prevalent among 15-19-year-old girls in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan (NFHS-5). Critics claim BBBP focuses on

awareness rather than root causes, while state capacity gaps hamper effective child protection due to paternalistic attitudes, underinvestment and data limitations.

Policy Recommendations

Recommendations for children's issues include bridging learning gaps with remedial classes and supplementary programs, along with promoting digital literacy through better internet access. India could adopt **Finland's** emphasis on teacher training and equitable resource distribution to reduce educational disparities.

To improve child nutrition through expanded meal programs and education, while addressing rural malnutrition, India can adopt lessons from Brazil's **"Bolsa Familia"** conditional cash transfer program. This approach could strengthen social safety nets to ensure vulnerable families receive adequate support for their children's basic needs.

Effective child protection requires strict law enforcement against abuse, exploitation, and trafficking, along with community awareness and support services for victims. Child involvement in decision-making, as per the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC), is essential, including participation in committees like **Bal Panchayats**. India should comply with **ILO** conventions on minimum employment age (138) and eliminating worst forms of child labor (182). Promoting gender equality involves challenging stereotypes through gender-sensitive education. Implementing strict laws against infanticide, child marriage, and violence ensures every child can grow up in a safe, supportive environment.

SCHEDULED CASTES (SC) AND SCHEDULED TRIBES (ST)

The caste system is a key part of India's stratification, historically shunning lower caste groups due to their traditional occupations and perceived "impurity." These outcast communities, deemed untouchable faced social rejection. Over time, recognizing their inherent dignity, they were formally recognized as **Scheduled Castes**.

Unlike Scheduled Castes, which fall within the caste hierarchy, **Scheduled Tribes** exist outside of it. They consist of indigenous groups with limited historical contact with the outside world who share a common culture rooted in shared location, ethnicity, language, traditional beliefs (Animism) and customary occupations such as hunting, gathering forest products, and subsistence agriculture.

Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are recognized as marginalized socio-economic groups in India due to historical disadvantages. They endure social stigma and discrimination, derogatory remarks and disrespect that reinforce their exclusion. Poverty, limited access to education and healthcare hinders social mobility, as many SCs and STs are trapped in cycles of disadvantage.

The Constitution provides safeguards: **Article 15** prohibits discrimination, **Article 15(4)** allows special provisions for advancement, **Article 17** abolishes untouchability, **Article 46** promotes educational and economic interests, **Article 164** mandates a Tribal Welfare Minister in select states, **Article 330** reserves Lok Sabha seats, and Articles **338/338A** establish national commissions.

Public policies are put in place for their upliftment and protection.

Public Policies for SCs & STs

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
REGULATORY POLICIES	Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955)	Prevents discrimination based on caste, ensuring civil rights for SCs.
	Prevention of Atrocities Act for SC & ST (1989)	Prevents, punishes atrocities against SCs and STs.
	Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers Act (2013)	Prohibits manual scavenging; provides rehabilitation for affected individuals.
	*The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) 1996	Extends Panchayati Raj system to Scheduled Areas, ensuring tribal self-governance.
	*The Forest Rights Act, 2006	Recognizes, protects STs' rights to forest resources and land.
	The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Act (2013)	Ensures fair compensation, rehabilitation in tribal areas for land acquisition.

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
SUBSTANTIVE POLICIES	SC Sub-Plan (SCSP)	Targeted development for SCs by allocating funds across government sectors.
	Prime Minister Anusuchit Jaati Abhyudaya Yojana (PM-AJAY)	Provides welfare; development programs for SC communities.
	Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS)/NAMASTE	Rehabilitation, livelihood support for manual scavengers.
	Pradhan Mantri Dakshta Aur Kushalta Sampann Hitgrahi (PMDAKSH)	Skill development, capacity-building for SC communities
	* Tribal Sub Plan	Targeted development for STs by allocating funds across government sectors
	*Pradhan Mantri PVTG Development Mission	Focuses on the development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas	Provides residential schools to improve education for girls.

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
DISTRIBUTIVE POLICIES	Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana	Provides hostel facilities for SC girls to encourage higher education.
	Mahila Adhikarita Yojana	Financial assistance to SC women for income generation.
	National Career Service Centre for SC/ST	Provides job placement support for SC and ST youth.
	*Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)	Offers educational opportunities with an emphasis on tribal culture & heritage.

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
REDISTRIBUTIVE POLICIES	Dr. Ambedkar Scheme for Social Integration through Inter-Caste Marriages	Promotes social integration, reduces caste-based discrimination by encouraging intercaste marriages.
	Shilp Sampada	Provides financial support, training for SC ST communities to improve entrepreneurial skills in traditional crafts.

Policies marked with an asterisk (*) are exclusively targeted towards Scheduled Tribes (STs)

Policy Impact

The Protection of Civil Rights Act of 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 (SC/ST Act), protect SCs and STs from discrimination and violence. The SC/ST Act establishes special courts and victim/witness protections.

PM-AJAY aims to reduce poverty among SC communities. As of January, 2024, it generated 3,802 Village Development Plans (**'Adarsh Gram'**), approved 1,655 projects benefiting over 305,000 people (**'Grants-in-Aid'**), and allocated ₹26.31 crore for hostels.

Educational access for SCs and STs has improved through initiatives like the Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme and the National Fellowship for SC/ST Students. **AISHE** report (2020-21) indicates a 28% increase in SC enrollment and a 47% increase in ST enrollment since 2014-15.

Stand-Up India (SUI) scheme facilitated over 235,000 loans to SC/ST and women entrepreneurs. MGNREGA has provided employment, with SCs and STs accounting for 40-45% of workdays. **Pradhan Mantri Employment Generation Programme** (PMEGP) benefited more than 45% of its beneficiaries from SC/ST backgrounds.

Healthcare access has improved through targeted schemes, with rising immunization rates for SC children and antenatal care for ST women. **Ayushman Bharat** provides health insurance to marginalized communities. The **Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan** addresses social infrastructure gaps for 5 crore tribal people. The **Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojna** (AMSY) offers concessional loans to tribal women. **TRIFED** initiatives like **Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram** focus on skill development and income growth. Tribes India outlets promote tribal products and fair pricing through schemes like MFP.

SC/ST representation in government jobs rose from around 15% in the 1980s to nearly 49% by 2013, largely due to reservations. A **Cornell study** found that "virtually all upward mobility gains in India over recent decades have accrued to Scheduled Castes and Tribes," suggesting that *affirmative action* positively impacted their social mobility. The study also showed SC/ST sons have closed roughly 50% and 30% of the mobility gap with forward castes, respectively, indicating significant progress from targeted policies.

Policy Shortcomings

Despite policies, SCs and STs face major socio-economic challenges. In 2011, **34% of SCs** were below the poverty line, versus 9% of other castes (World Bank). **Tribal poverty** was high: 45.3% (rural) and 24.1% (urban) in 2011-12. **IMR** for SCs is nearly 83 per 1,000 live births, compared to 61.8 for non-SC/ST. In 2022, crimes against SCs increased by 13.1% (57,582 cases) and against STs by 14.3% (10,604 cases) over 2021 (NCB).

The 2011 census data shows that access to tap water, sanitation facilities, and clean cooking fuel is lower among SC and ST populations who are socially ostracised. **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)** within these populations have even less access to these essential resources.

	TOTAL	SC	ST
Group-A	50,068	6,440 (12.86%)	2,826 (5.64%)
Group-B	1,25,732	20,954 (16.66%)	8,244 (6.55%)
Group-C (excluding Safai Karmacharis)	3,22,503	58,774 (18.22%)	22,296 (6.91%)
Group-C (Safai Karmacharis)	13,772	4,507 (32.72%)	1,056 (7.66%)
Total	5,12,075	90,675 (17.70%)	34,422 (6.72%)

The *table* displays total Central employees and their representation in SC/ST groups revealing that SCs and STs are concentrated in **Group C** positions, indicating that they are still not integrated into mainstream roles where they can influence policies effectively.

The **Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan** and **Tribal Sub-Plan**, created in the 1980s, aimed to rectify historical injustices by directing development benefits to these marginalized groups. However, these goals remain largely **unfulfilled** even after more than thirty years.

The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) noted that funds for marginalized communities often go to general schemes like road construction instead of targeted programs such as scholarships. While NREGA funding has increased, funding for the National Safai Karmachari

Finance and Development Corporation and the National Scheduled Caste Finance and Development Corporation has significantly decreased.

Displacement of tribal populations has been observed in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Odisha due to development projects and conservation efforts (Indian Express). In **Maharashtra**, approximately 62% of land claims made by tribals were rejected, rendering public policy protections ineffective.

Dr. Ambedkar Scheme for Social Integration through **Inter-Caste Marriages** had limited impact since financial incentives alone cannot ensure genuine social integration. Questions arise regarding the long-term sustainability of initiatives like **Shilp Sampada** if artisan communities do not receive continued support beyond initial funding periods.

Critics argue that some upward communities have altered their identities to access ST benefits, particularly in **Rajasthan**. Similar concerns arise with SC reservations, as studies show that existing quotas benefit specific groups, leaving others marginalized. This prompts a debate on introducing a *creamy layer* based on socio-economic criteria to address biases, though it remains uncertain if this would enable **social mobility** for tribal and low-caste individuals.

Policy Recommendations

Addressing the challenges faced by SCs and STs in India requires a multilayered approach. For SCs, enhanced representation can improve advocacy through data-driven policies from the **Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC)** and updated laws like the Prevention of Atrocities Act (POCA). Effective law enforcement is crucial; empowering SC communities to report discrimination and monitor implementation enhances societal vigilance.

Enhancing education, reducing dropouts, offering scholarships, and fostering entrepreneurship through skill building, microfinance, and market access are key with effective local community engagement involving government, civil society, and SC communities. To combat discrimination against SCs, efforts must include targeted campaigns to raise awareness on social media and in public.

Addressing challenges faced by STs requires political representation that empowers them to oppose mining and large-scale projects. Before the **Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act** (PESA), mining regions saw deforestation and displacement. However, PESA has notably reduced deforestation rates in affected villages by providing a framework for organized protests against mining operations (Land Conflict Watch, 2022).

Improving access to quality education tailored to tribal cultures can reduce dropout rates among tribal children. Economic empowerment initiatives should focus on creating opportunities for ST entrepreneurship through skill development, microfinance, and market access. Community engagement between government, civil society, and ST communities is essential to address local needs effectively.
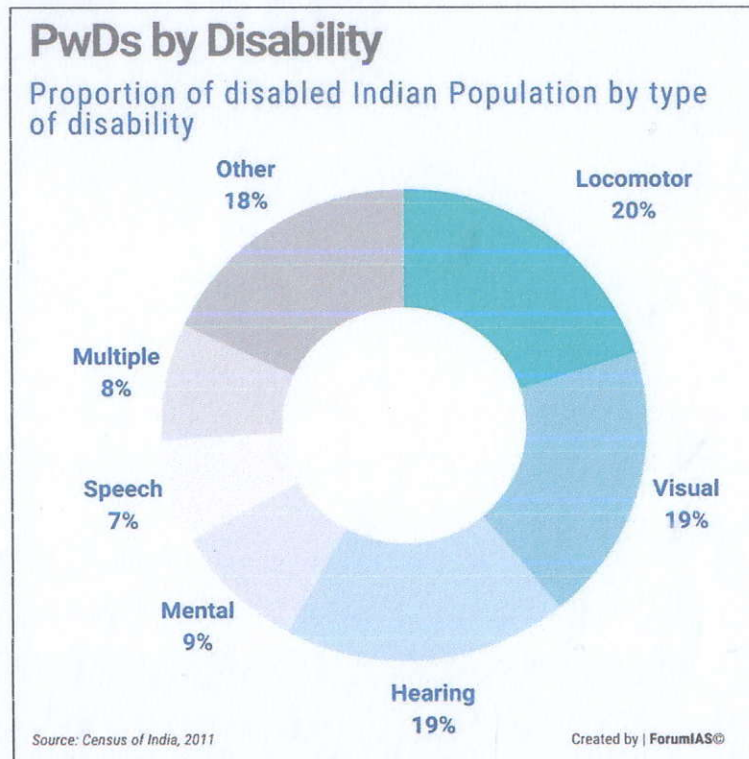
The scope of **Tribes Advisory Council** must be broadened; protect tribal land and rights, preserve tribal identity, involve tribes in forest management, and align with the **Convention on Cultural Diversity**. Research on PVTGs will aid in implementing effective programs to elevate their status.

Persons With Disabilities

*Defying all odds, **Deepa Malik** etched her name in history as the first Indian woman to win a Paralympic medal, a testament to the extraordinary potential within Persons with Disabilities.*

Any person unable to ensure by himself or herself, wholly or partly the necessities of a normal individual and or social life as a result of a deficiency either congenital or not in his/her physical or mental abilities" could be described as disabled - **UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975).**

Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) face marginalization due to long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, hindering their full participation in society. They encounter stigma, discrimination, and neglect stemming from socio-psychological and cultural biases, which underestimate their abilities.

PwDs by Disability

Proportion of disabled Indian Population by type of disability

- Other 18%
- Locomotor 20%
- Multiple 8%
- Speech 7%
- Visual 19%
- Mental 9%
- Hearing 19%

Source: Census of India, 2011   Created by | ForumIAS©

In India, over 70 million individuals live with some form of disability, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies (NCPEDP). The Constitution safeguards PwDs through **Article 14** which promotes equality, **Article 15** prohibits discrimination, **Article 21** life and liberty for all, and **Article 32** justice. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 aims to ensure equality and promote the economic and social rights of PwDs.

PwDs face ongoing challenges, which is why public policies exclusive to them are implemented.

Public Policies for PwDs

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
REGULATORY POLICIES	The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD),2016	Ensuring rights, protection for PwDs in India
	Mental Healthcare Act, 2017	Providing mental health services , protecting the rights of those with mental illness
	Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992	Regulates, sets minimum standards for training professionals in rehabilitation, special education
	National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities Act, 1999	Establishes a statutory body for the welfare of PwDs, focusing on autism, cerebral palsy, multiple disabilities

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
SUBSTANTIVE POLICIES	Draft National Policy for Persons with Disabilities	Proposed to revise the 2006 policy to align it with UNCRPD, RPwD Act 2016, NEP 2020
	Samarth Scheme	Skill training, creating job opportunities for PwDs
	NIRAMAYA Health Insurance Scheme	Provides health insurance specifically tailored for PwDs, addressing healthcare needs
	National Action Plan for Skill Development of Persons with Disabilities (NAP-SDP)	Framework to enhance the skills, employability of PwDs, promoting workforce participation

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
DISTRIBUTIVE POLICIES	Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)	Works to make public infrastructure, transport, buildings more accessible to PwDs
	ADIP Scheme (Assistance for Purchase/Fitting of Aids/Appliances)	Financial assistance to PwDs for acquiring mobility aids and other assistive devices
	Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme	Financial support to PwDs living below the poverty line through a monthly pension.
	Scheme for Implementing the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 (SIPDA)	Provides grants, funds for the implementation of provisions under the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
REDISTRIBUTIVE POLICIES	Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)	Provides financial assistance to NGOs working for the rehabilitation of PwDs

Policy Impact

Aligned with the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, the RPwD Act aims to ensure dignity for PwDs. It recognizes disabilities from 7 to 21 categories, increasing access to support. Government job reservation for PwDs increased from 3% to 4%. The Act incentivizes private employers to have at least 5% PwD employees, streamlines disability certificate acquisition, establishes special courts for PwD rights violations, and prioritizes grievance redressal. District Courts can grant joint decision-making guardianship, enhancing PwD **autonomy**.

Unique Disability Identity (UDID) Project creates a national database for PwDs and issues UDID cards for all disabilities. Currently, over 1.10 crore UDID cards have been generated and issued through the **Swavlamban** Portal.

The **ADIP** Scheme benefited around 28.65 lakh individuals through 15,904 camps. **Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme** (DDRS) provided ₹805.66 crore in grants to 4,730 projects,

aiding 3,49,240 individuals. The **Accessible India Campaign** enhanced physical accessibility by retrofitting over 10,000 buildings, promoting easier navigation.

National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation (NHFDC), offers loan assistance under schemes like **Divyangjan Swablamban Yojana** and **Vishesh Microfinance Yojana** at concessional rates to eligible PwDs. Nine National Institutes provide rehabilitation services, training for professionals, and conduct disability research serving 1.79 crore PwDs.

The **Umbrella Scholarship Scheme** offers pre-matric, post-matric, top class education, National fellowship, National Overseas, and free coaching for students with disabilities with funds disbursed to 2.57 lakh disabled students.

National Action Plan for Skill Development of PwDs aims to enhance skills for self-reliance. Training is provided by ETPs from government and non-government organizations. ₹204.68 crore has been allocated for training 1.94 lakh PwDs until 2023-24, leading to increased employment rates post-training.

"Awareness Generation & Publicity Scheme" under SIPDA promotes programs for PwDs through workshops for officials. Individuals like Iytha Mallikarjuna and Prateek Khandelwal exemplify resilience in the disabled community. Mallikarjuna's IDEA has aided over 1,060 Divyang entrepreneurs creating 2,500 jobs, while Khandelwal's 'Ramp My City' improves urban accessibility.

Policy Shortcomings

The RPwD Act's execution is lacking, as noted by the Supreme Court in the **Seema Girija Lal** case. Observations highlight inadequate resource allocation. The Parliamentary Standing Committee reported suboptimal budget allocations for PwD programs. From 2016-17 to 2020-21, components under the **Scheme for Implementing Persons with Disabilities Act** (SIPDA) increased from 6 to 13 but budget allocations rose by less than 9%. In 2020, despite a ₹4,500 crore allocation for PwDs, underutilization was reported, with only 55% of funds effectively used.

Disability pensions like the **Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme** provide only ₹500 per month, insufficient to meet inflation and rising living costs. Current cost norms under the **DDRS** are inadequate to attract qualified professionals to these areas.

Non-receipt of Utilisation Certificates delayed fund release for PwD initiatives. About 69% of PwDs reside in rural areas with limited access to rehabilitation services. Despite training under **National Action Plan for Skill Development** (NAP-SDP), low placement rates persist due to hiring discrimination. The NCPEDP reported 75% unemployment rate for PwDs in 2020, with many trained individuals unable to find jobs. Only 20% of government organizations comply with the RPwD Act's employment mandates, and just 14% of public infrastructure is fully accessible. Lack of employment opportunities and financial support remains a significant issue.

Policy Recommendations

Increasing financial support for PwDs is essential to ensure that basic needs of PwDs are met. Improving **accessibility** should be prioritized by integrating accessibility criteria into all central and state-level procurement laws related to physical, digital, and transport infrastructure. Improving impact assessment through the development of robust data systems will enable better monitoring of the implementation of the RPwD.

The Union ministry should provide guidance to state agencies with expert advice, clear targets, and the necessary resources to facilitate effective implementation of the Act's provisions. Enhancing collaboration among government bodies, civil society organizations, disability rights groups, and the private sector is vital in promoting inclusion and safeguarding the rights of PwDs.

Prioritizing the implementation of Section 48 of the Act, which mandates **social audits** of general schemes involving PwDs, will ensure accountability and transparency.

India can learn from **Sweden's** comprehensive disability policies, which emphasize equal living conditions and full participation for PwDs, ensuring their rights are upheld through systematic monitoring and inclusive practices.

Finally, success stories of individuals within the disabled community should be highlighted to inspire others and demonstrate the capabilities of PwDs. By recognizing their contributions, society can work towards dismantling stereotypes and creating opportunities that empower individuals with disabilities.

Transgenders (LGBTQIA+ Community)

The LGBTQIA+ community is an umbrella term encompassing individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions, including lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, queer individuals, intersex people, asexuals, and those questioning their identity.
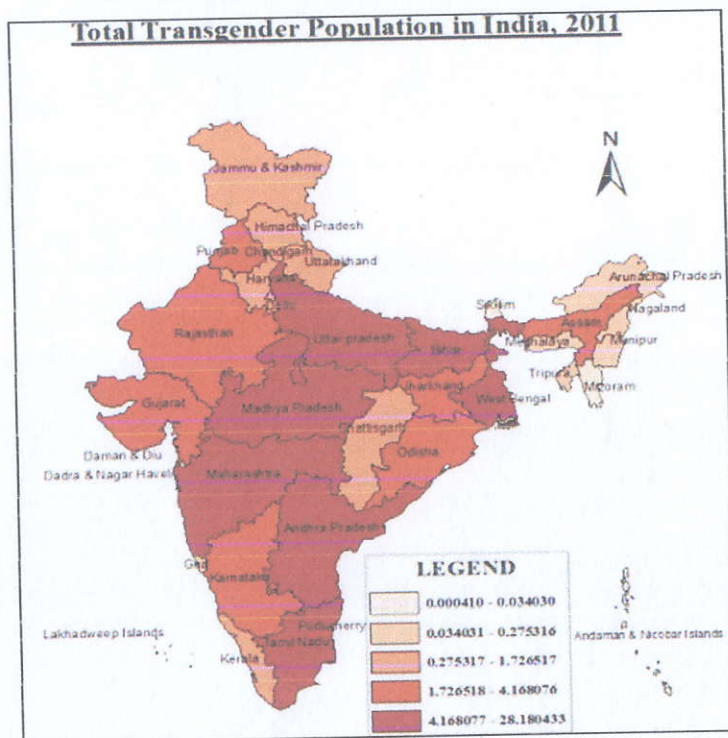
This community constitutes approximately 10% of India's population, translating to around 135 million people. Notably, the 2011 census recorded approximately 600,000 transgender individuals, who have gender identities that differ from their assigned sex at birth.

A historic moment in the fight for LGBTQIA+ rights occurred in 2018 when the **Supreme Court** of India decriminalized consensual same-sex relationships by reinstating the right to privacy. This ruling was pivotal in affirming the dignity and rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the country.

India has long been recognized for its progressive stance towards diversity and inclusivity with the country being among the first in South Asia to legally recognize transgender individuals as a distinct category, providing them with rights and protections.

The Indian Constitution safeguards transgender rights through **Article 14** on equality, **Article 15** on discrimination prevention, and **Article 21** on the right to life and personal liberty. **The NALSA v. Union of India (2014)** judgment recognized transgender individuals as a third gender entitled to all fundamental rights.

However, challenges persist, requiring specific public policies.

Total Transgender Population in India, 2011

LEGEND

	0.000410 - 0.034030
	0.034031 - 0.275316
	0.275317 - 1.726517
	1.726518 - 4.168076
	4.168077 - 28.180433

Public Policies for Transgenders

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
REGULATORY POLICIES	Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019	Defines transgender persons, prohibits discrimination, criminalizes violence against transgender individuals, establishes the National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP)
	Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020	Supplements the Act by defining the identity of transgender persons, prohibiting discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, property rights, and public services.
	The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012	Protects all children, including transgender children, from sexual abuse, ensuring child rights and welfare

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
SUBSTANTIVE POLICIES	National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP)	Ensures equal opportunities for transgender individuals in education, employment, other sectors, aligning with the 2019 Act and 2020 Rules.
	Equal Opportunities Policy for Transgender Persons	Aims to protect marginalized children, including transgender children, in areas like education and protection.
	National Action Plan for Children (2016–2020)	Protects all children, including transgender children, from sexual abuse, ensuring child rights and welfare

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
DISTRIBUTIVE POLICIES	SMILE - Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise	Provides support for marginalized individuals, including transgender persons, focusing on rehabilitation, medical facilities, counseling, education, skill development.
	Financial Assistance Programs	Scholarships for transgender students, financial assistance for gender-affirmation surgeries.

TYPE OF POLICY	NAME OF THE POLICY	PURPOSE
REDISTRIBUTIVE POLICIES	Reservations in Education and Employment	Following the Supreme Court's recognition, transgender individuals are provided with reservations in education and employment to promote equality

Policy Impact

The **SMILE** scheme encompasses an array of support measures designed to uplift the transgender community. With an allocation of ₹365 crores from 2021-22 to 2025-26, it offers scholarships from class nine to post-graduation, along with skill training and livelihood support for employment and economic independence.

The SMILE scheme offers medical support for gender-affirmation and related care. **Garima Grehs** offer shelter to abandoned and orphaned transgender individuals. **Transgender protection cells** provide support in case of offenses. In addition to welfare measures, integrating gender dimensions into teacher training programs under **National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement** (NISHTHA) fosters a gender-sensitive educational environment.

The collaboration between the National Health Authority and the Department of Social Justice extended **Ayushman Bharat Yojana** to transgender individuals. This significant development in healthcare access has benefited over 3,000 transgender beneficiaries by providing essential healthcare with financial packages. These policies showcase a dedicated effort to enhance the lives, rights, dignity, and well-being of transgender persons in India.

Policy Shortcomings

LGBTQIA+ individuals in India face discrimination across all life aspects. Homophobia and transphobia lead to marginalization and mental health issues. Over half of LGBTQIA+ students report peer harassment, while 15% face bullying from teachers, contributing to higher dropout rates. Violence from family and society is prevalent, with 99% of transgender individuals experiencing social rejection. 89% of qualified transgender individuals are unemployed.

India lacks comprehensive anti-discrimination laws to protect LGBTQIA+ rights, and existing laws are poorly implemented. Underrepresentation of LGBTQIA+ voices in politics and media hinders progress. Rural individuals face even greater challenges due to limited awareness, support, and access to resources.

Studies indicate that many healthcare professionals lack training on LGBTQIA+ issues, leading to further marginalization. This lack of inclusivity not only affects physical health but also contributes to mental health crises within the community

The Transgender Persons Act (2019) is criticized for contradicting the NALSA judgment by not fully recognizing self-determined gender identity. It overlooks civil rights like marriage and inheritance, focuses mainly on Hijras and trans women, and worsens economic vulnerability by criminalizing begging without providing alternative livelihoods.

Societal attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ individuals remain largely negative, with many fearing social ostracism or violence if they openly express their identities. This fear perpetuates a cycle where many choose to conceal their identities rather than seek support to improve their quality of life.

Policy Recommendations

To foster inclusion, legal recognition of marriage, adoption and parental rights must be expanded. Strengthening Transgender Persons Act (2019) and decriminalizing Section 377 is essential. Anti-discrimination laws should be implemented with strong enforcement. Simplifying legal gender recognition processes will create accessible systems for changing gender identity documentation.

The government should implement targeted campaigns in schools, communities, and workplaces to eradicate homophobia and transphobia, while LGBTQIA+ education in school curricula can shift societal attitudes. Schools and universities should mandate gender-neutral facilities and train teachers in gender inclusivity.

Access to gender-affirming healthcare, including hormone therapy, surgery, and mental health services, must be improved through public health systems. Employment programs focusing on transgender individuals' skills are necessary, and employment quotas should be implemented in both sectors.

Collaboration among government, civil society, and private sector is essential for the social integration of LGBTQIA+ individuals and addressing their needs. India must incorporate the **Yogyakarta Principles** into national law to strengthen its commitment to LGBTQIA+ rights. Adopting UN human rights resolutions and expanding gender-inclusive development goals will be vital for India's progress. Independent bodies must be created to monitor policy implementation. A multifaceted strategy involving legal reforms, education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and human rights alignment will lead India toward inclusivity for its LGBTQIA+ community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay explored the complex nature of marginalization in India, highlighting challenges faced by women, children, Scheduled Castes/Tribes, Persons with Disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ individuals. The process of policy implementation, from agenda setting to bureaucratic application, introduces gaps that deter effective outcomes. These gaps are further increased by a lack of awareness about available schemes, with reports indicating that only **40%** of beneficiaries are aware of the support they are entitled to. While policies like reservations and BBBP reflect **Fraser's redistribution and recognition**, the creation of a more equitable future requires several key steps.

- Local bodies like **Panchayati Raj** Institutions (PRIs) are crucial for effective service delivery; strengthening grassroots governance will be helpful.

- The use of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and Big Data can improve the targeting of welfare initiatives by identifying vulnerable populations in real-time.

- Policies should prioritize capacity-building over one-time assistance.

- Recognizing **intersectionality** of caste, gender, disability, and class will create effective policy solutions.

India's public policies demonstrate resilience and a commitment to inclusive development, reflecting the aspirations of our leaders. With continued efforts in governance, the nation is well on its way to creating a truly equitable society.

References

- PIB- Year-End Review MoSJ (2024), Schemes For Children (2023),Welfare Of Transgender Persons In India (2022), Initiatives for SC Welfare (2022), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme (2021)
- DEPwD Report – 10 years achievement
- IJRESS- Impact Of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2021)
- IJCRT- Social & Economic Status Of The Marginalized Communities In India (2023)
- UNICEF- Country Office Annual Report (India, 2023)
- Education for All in India (EFA) - Out-of-School Children (2023-2024)
- The Indian Express - SCs, STs in central govt (2022), land claims made by tribals (2018)
- The Print - India's inheritance system is complex (2024)
- The Mooknayak - Budget 2024-25: Clarion Call of Inclusivity (2024)
- Business World- How the Swachh Bharat Mission Uplifts Women (2022)
- DownToEarth - Political representation of STs can lead to improved forest cover (2023)
- Vision IAS - Social empowerment & welfare schemes (2024), Women & their issues (2024)
- Naik. N -Transgenderism in India: Insights from current census
- Asher, S., Novosad, P., & Rafkin, C.-Intergenerational Mobility in India (2018)