The Psychology Behind Political Ideologies While Formulating Policy For Women in India

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Abstract

The intersection of political ideologies and psychological frameworks plays a vital role in framing policies associated with women's empowerment and securities, especially in complex, sometimes conservative and diverse societies such as India. This paper explores how political ideologies by constituting the political culture of people—ranging from conservative to progressive—advise the creation and implementation of policies aimed at women in India, with a focus on the psychological factors underlying these decisions. Areas such as education, health, employment, and safety for women usually impact by cognitive biases, stereotypes, and social identity while policy making. Using a blend of political and psychological approach, this study highlights how policymakers' beliefs, intellectual biases, and emotional tendencies impact the formulation of policies, often reflecting societal norms and stereotypes rather than a comprehensive approach to gender equality. By examining key policies such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme, the Maternity Benefit Act, and the Nirbhaya Fund, the paper explores the psychological underpinnings of such policies and how they reflect the broader political ideology of the ruling parties. The research further discusses the implications of these psychological factors for achieving real and meaningful gender equality in India, proposing the need for a more integrated approach that blends political, psychological, and social considerations in the policy-making process.

Keywords: Political ideologies, Psychology, Women's empowerment, Gender equality, Cognitive biases, Stereotypes, Policy formulation, Gender roles, Patriarchy, Social identity, Gender-sensitive policies, Women's policies, Cognitive reasoning, Social perceptions, Indian politics.

Introduction

Political Science Perspective

Political ideologies shape public policy by offering a framework through which political parties and governments interpret issues, prioritize agendas, and create laws that govern society. In the case of India, political ideologies play an essential role in framing policies that address the needs of women. Ideologies, whether rooted in conservatism, liberalism, or feminism, influence the approach to gender policies in various ways (Bardhan, 2020). India's complex socio-political landscape, marked by diversity in culture, religion, and tradition, significantly influences the nature of women's policies.

Progressive political ideologies often advocate for structural reforms aimed at promoting women's rights and ensuring equality in educational, economic, and political spheres (Bhattacharya, 2019). For instance, during the tenure of Indira Gandhi, India witnessed a significant shift in the empowerment of women, marked by policies that focused on women's education and welfare (Kohli, 2015). In more recent years, the government's emphasis on women's safety, such as the establishment of the Nirbhaya Fund after the infamous 2012 gang rape incident, reflects a more reactive, security-oriented approach to gender policies under the leadership of more conservative ideologies (Mishra, 2018).

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, which was adopted by the Indian government in 2001, is one such example of progressive policymaking aimed at addressing gender disparities. According to a study by Desai (2017), the policy reflects a mix of both the Nehruvian welfare state model and liberal feminist ideologies, focusing on increasing women's participation in national development. However, despite the political will to enhance women's empowerment, the actual outcomes of such policies remain mixed due to the influence of entrenched social norms and political ideologies that view women through a conservative lens.

Contrastingly, conservative ideologies often frame women's issues within the domain of traditional roles—mainly as mothers, wives, or daughters. As a result, gender policies formulated under such ideologies may focus more on preserving family structures, emphasizing women's roles in the home, and offering protectionist policies aimed at safeguarding women from violence, rather than encouraging their autonomy (Chakravarti, 2020). While policies like the Maternity Benefit Act of 2017 reflect a protective stance, it can

be argued that such policies do not go far enough in addressing the systemic barriers women face in employment and leadership roles (Sarin, 2019).

Psychological Perspective

Psychological theories offer a powerful lens through which the shaping of gender-specific policies can be understood. Cognitive biases, stereotypes, and social identity play a critical role in shaping how policymakers and the public view women's issues. Gender-based policies are often influenced by deeply ingrained psychological constructs that perpetuate stereotypical views of women and their place in society (Lips, 2016). These cognitive biases can influence policymakers' judgments, leading to policies that either reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles.

Stereotypes regarding women—such as the belief that women are better suited for caregiving and household responsibilities—affect the framing of policies that address women's work-life balance, public safety, and education (Phelan et al., 2019). For instance, policies such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme, which promotes the education and safety of girls, are often shaped by an underlying narrative that women need protection and that education alone will solve gender imbalances in the long run (Sharma & Chawla, 2021). However, this approach may overlook structural factors like social class, economic barriers, and systemic gender inequality that are equally important in addressing the needs of marginalized women (Srivastava, 2022).

Further complicating the situation are cognitive biases such as in-group favoritism and moral reasoning. Political leaders, influenced by their social identity, may frame women's policies in a way that reflects the values and norms of their dominant voting base. In-group favoritism can lead to policies that favor certain groups of women over others. For instance, urban women may benefit more from policies than rural women, simply because of the way political ideologies cater to urban constituencies (Chandran, 2020).

Research on moral reasoning in political decision-making, such as the work by Haidt (2012), suggests that ideological positions often reflect underlying moral intuitions that shape how gender policies are constructed. For example, liberal ideologies may prioritize policies based on fairness and equality, advocating for comprehensive gender quotas or laws against discrimination. Conversely, conservative ideologies may focus more on maintaining order

and hierarchy, which may result in policies that place less emphasis on equality and more on protecting women within predefined roles (Haidt, 2012).

In addition to stereotypes and cognitive biases, social identity theory offers another explanation for how political ideologies influence policy decisions regarding women. Political leaders often create policies that align with the broader social identity of their constituencies. According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), people derive a sense of identity from group membership, and this can lead to in-group bias, which shapes policymaking. In India, where regional and religious identities are deeply entrenched, gender policies are often formulated with the aim of reinforcing specific political or religious ideologies, sometimes at the expense of addressing the universal needs of women (Varma, 2021).

The intersection of political ideologies and psychological factors is critical in understanding how policies affecting women are framed and implemented in India. While political ideologies, driven by liberal or conservative beliefs, often determine the direction of policy, psychological factors such as stereotypes, biases, and social identity heavily influence the actual content and impact of these policies. As evidenced by case studies like the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme, the Nirbhaya Fund, and the Maternity Benefit Act, the policies aimed at women can either empower them or reinforce their traditional roles depending on the interplay of these factors. An integrated approach that considers both the political ideologies and the psychological underpinnings of policymakers is essential for creating effective, transformative policies for women in India.

Review Of Literauture

The intersection of political ideologies and the psychological factors that influence policymaking has been a focal point in understanding the development of women-centric policies, especially in India. This area of study reveals that the framing of policies related to women's welfare is not simply a procedural task; rather, it is deeply shaped by the ideologies of political parties in power and the psychological constructs held by policymakers. In a diverse society like India, these policies often reflect both the political agendas of the governing bodies and the prevailing psychological biases, societal stereotypes, and perceptions surrounding gender roles. This literature review aims to examine how these factors come together in shaping policies for women in India.

- **Political Ideologies and Gender Policy Formation in India**

Political ideologies provide the ideological frameworks that guide how political leaders address societal issues, and gender equality is no exception. In India, political ideologies, whether progressive or conservative, have a significant influence on how gender-related issues are understood and dealt with in policymaking. Liberal and progressive ideologies, typically aligned with feminist thought, advocate for dismantling patriarchal systems and fostering gender equality in various domains such as education, employment, and political participation (Bhattacharya, 2019). These ideologies often push for systemic reforms aimed at empowering women in all aspects of society.

For instance, during the leadership of Indira Gandhi, significant strides were made in creating policies that focused on women's education, healthcare, and welfare, reflecting a commitment to progressive social change (Kohli, 2015). However, the direction of women's policies has changed with the rise of more conservative ideologies. These ideologies often stress traditional family values and roles for women, which influence policy design to focus more on protective measures rather than challenging structural inequalities. For example, policies like the Nirbhaya Fund, initiated after the 2012 Delhi gang rape, largely focus on enhancing women's safety but have been critiqued for not addressing deeper cultural issues related to gender equality (Mishra, 2018).

In contrast, the first generations of gender-related policies in post-independence India, such as family planning and welfare programs, were designed around a welfare state model. The Family Planning Program, introduced in the 1950s, focused on women's reproductive rights and welfare, and over time, these policies expanded to include access to education and healthcare for women (Srinivasan, 2005). These shifts in policy highlight how political ideologies guide the agenda-setting process and the extent to which women's empowerment is prioritized within the political landscape.

- **Psychological Influences on Policy Formation**

In addition to political ideologies, psychological factors play a crucial role in shaping the perception of gender-related issues and influencing the policies created in response. Psychological research reveals that cognitive biases, stereotypes, and social identity significantly impact how gender issues are framed. For instance, gender stereotypes in India

often view women primarily through the lens of their roles as caregivers, homemakers, and mothers. These stereotypes shape policies that focus on areas such as maternal health, domestic violence, and education for girls, but may overlook the broader structural barriers that hinder women's economic, political, and social participation (Chakravarti, 2020).

A key psychological concept that shapes policymaking is **social identity theory**, which suggests that people's decisions are influenced by their identification with certain social groups. In a country as diverse as India, where regional, caste, and religious identities are prevalent, political leaders may tailor gender policies to align with the preferences and values of their constituencies. This phenomenon can lead to the marginalization of certain groups of women, especially those from rural, lower-caste, or economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Chandran, 2020). As a result, policies may be more responsive to the needs of urban women, with rural women often left behind due to the prioritization of urban-centric reforms.

Moreover, **cognitive dissonance**—a psychological theory suggesting that individuals experience discomfort when their beliefs contradict new information—can influence how policymakers create gender policies. This discomfort can make it challenging for political leaders to fully confront gender-based inequalities and reform entrenched cultural attitudes. As a result, gender policies may be watered down or designed in ways that avoid addressing deeply rooted societal norms (Festinger, 1957).

Another psychological theory, **confirmation bias**, also plays a role in policymaking. Confirmation bias refers to the tendency to favor information that aligns with pre-existing beliefs, which can lead to the creation of policies that reinforce the status quo rather than challenge it. In the context of women's empowerment, this bias can result in policies that focus on traditional roles for women, such as protectionism, rather than promoting structural equality (Nickerson, 1998).

- **Case Studies of Gender Policies in India**

Several key policies in India highlight how political ideologies and psychological influences shape women-centric policymaking. For example, the **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme** (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child), launched in 2015, was designed to improve the sex ratio and promote girls' education. On the surface, this initiative appears to be a progressive step towards gender equality. However, it has faced criticism for focusing

primarily on educating girls while not addressing other critical issues such as women's access to healthcare, employment, or political representation (Sharma & Chawla, 2021). This emphasis on education is reflective of a psychological tendency to view women's empowerment primarily as an educational issue, rather than considering broader societal and structural changes.

The **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act of 2017**, which increased paid maternity leave for women from 12 to 26 weeks, provides another example of a policy shaped by political and psychological factors. While the law is a significant step forward in supporting working women, it has been criticized for not tackling the larger issue of gender discrimination in the workplace. Critics argue that it fails to challenge the patriarchal assumptions about women's primary role as mothers and caregivers, which limits the scope of true gender equality in the workplace (Srinivasan, 2005).

Another example is the **Nirbhaya Fund**, which was established after the 2012 Delhi gang rape to improve women's safety. While the fund focuses on strengthening the legal infrastructure and offering support for women's safety, critics contend that it does not address the root causes of gender-based violence, such as patriarchal cultural norms and discriminatory attitudes towards women (Sarin, 2019). The fund's narrow focus on punitive measures reflects a psychological tendency to respond to gender-based violence through reactive, short-term solutions rather than addressing the deeper societal issues that perpetuate such violence.

- **The Impact of Psychological Biases on Policy Outcomes**

Psychological biases are crucial in understanding how gender policies are designed and their potential outcomes. **Confirmation bias**, for instance, leads policymakers to favor information that aligns with their preconceived ideas about gender roles. In India, this often results in the creation of policies that reinforce traditional gender roles and fail to address systemic gender inequality (Nickerson, 1998).

Similarly, **moral reasoning** plays an important role in shaping how gender issues are perceived. According to Haidt (2012), policymakers often make moral judgments based on intuition and emotions rather than rational analysis. This tendency can result in policies that

are focused on moral righteousness—such as punishing perpetrators of sexual violence—while failing to address the structural factors that contribute to gender-based violence.

Finally, **ingroup favoritism** can lead to the development of policies that cater predominantly to the needs of specific groups of women, such as urban or middle-class women, while neglecting marginalized women. As shown in the implementation of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme, policies that are more effective in urban areas may not be as successful in rural areas due to the lack of adequate resources and infrastructure (Chandran, 2020).

The formulation of women-specific policies in India is deeply shaped by both political ideologies and psychological factors. As illustrated by policies like the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme, the Maternity Benefit Act, and the Nirbhaya Fund, political ideologies often influence the direction of policy, while psychological factors, including stereotypes, biases, and moral reasoning, affect the way these policies are framed and implemented. A comprehensive understanding of both political ideologies and psychological influences is necessary to create effective policies that promote true gender equality in India.

Objectives

On the basis of introduction and review of literature following objectives are framed for this research paper:

1. Examine the Influence of Political Ideologies on Women-Centric Policy Formulation in India
2. Explore the Psychological Factors Affecting Policymakers' Attitudes Towards Gender Equality
3. Analyse the Differential Impact of Gender Policies on Rural vs. Urban Women
4. Assess the Effectiveness of Existing Women's Welfare Policies and Propose Improvements

Results And Discussions

The results and discussions for the present research paper are based upon the set objectives, which are discussed in detail below:

1. Examine the Influence of Political Ideologies on Women-Centric Policy Formulation in India

Political ideologies play a crucial role in shaping policy decisions, particularly when it comes to gender equality and women's empowerment. In India, the political landscape has evolved significantly, and various political parties bring their unique ideological stances to the table when framing policies for women. For instance, progressive parties often advocate for policies that focus on women's rights, healthcare, and employment, while conservative ideologies may focus on traditional roles for women and promote protective measures rather than systemic reform. A significant example is the influence of India's first female Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, who made notable contributions to women's empowerment during her tenure. Under her leadership, policies like the National Policy for Women's Empowerment (2001) were designed to address issues such as gender-based violence, economic participation, and political representation (Kohli, 2015). On the other hand, conservative ideologies that are currently in power may prioritize women's roles in family and society rather than pursuing a more radical transformation of gender relations.

Recent studies emphasize that the ideological direction of the ruling government significantly influences the priority given to gender-based issues. For example, political polarization between liberal and conservative views on gender equality often leads to policies that either challenge patriarchal systems or reinforce traditional gender roles (Sharma & Chawla, 2021). This ideological divide was visible during the implementation of schemes like **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** and **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**, where conservative political views emphasized the importance of women's safety and hygiene in the family setting, often ignoring structural gender inequalities (Mishra, 2018).

2. Explore the Psychological Factors Affecting Policymakers' Attitudes Towards Gender Equality

The psychological factors that influence policymaking in India are complex and multifaceted. One of the key psychological mechanisms is **confirmation bias**, where policymakers tend to favor information that aligns with their existing beliefs and values about gender roles. For instance, gender stereotypes in India often depict women as primarily caregivers and homemakers, which influences policymakers to design policies that focus on maternal health, childcare, and domestic violence. This focus, however, often overlooks broader issues such as

women's economic empowerment, access to leadership roles, and representation in higher education and employment.

The role of **cognitive dissonance** is also relevant here, as policymakers may experience discomfort when confronted with information that challenges their preconceived notions about gender roles (Festinger, 1957). In the case of policies like the **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act of 2017**, which expanded maternity leave for women in formal employment, the policy focuses on traditional roles of women as mothers rather than addressing structural barriers in the workplace related to gender discrimination (Srinivasan, 2005). This highlights the psychological reluctance to fully engage with gender equality beyond the protective measures that align with traditional roles.

3. Analyze the Differential Impact of Gender Policies on Rural vs. Urban Women

Gender policies in India often fail to account for the significant differences in the lived experiences of rural and urban women. Urban women typically have better access to resources, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities compared to their rural counterparts. However, policies such as the **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme** have been criticized for being more successful in urban areas due to better infrastructure and support systems, while rural women often face additional challenges like lower literacy rates, inadequate healthcare facilities, and lack of employment opportunities (Chandran, 2020). The urban-centric focus of these policies often leads to a marginalization of rural women, who face unique challenges that require more context-specific interventions.

Research also indicates that rural women are often excluded from the decision-making processes that shape these policies. The gap in access to information, education, and financial independence means that rural women may not benefit equally from women-centric policies that prioritize urban settings. For example, while **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** focused on sanitation improvements for rural women, its implementation did not always address the complex socio-economic factors that limit women's autonomy in rural areas (Sharma & Chawla, 2021).

4. Assess the Effectiveness of Existing Women's Welfare Policies and Propose Improvements

Despite several efforts to address gender inequality, many existing policies in India fall short of achieving long-term gender equality. While policies like **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** and the **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act** have made strides in certain areas, they are often criticized for not addressing the underlying social and structural causes of gender inequality. For example, the **Nirbhaya Fund**, established after the 2012 Delhi gang rape to improve women's safety, focuses on immediate, reactive measures such as improving police infrastructure and setting up helplines for women. However, it does not address deeper societal issues, including pervasive patriarchy, cultural norms that condone gender-based violence, or the lack of representation of women in law enforcement and policymaking bodies (Sarin, 2019).

Studies suggest that a more integrated, long-term approach is necessary to create lasting changes. For instance, policies must address both the immediate needs of women, such as safety and legal protection, and broader structural reforms that ensure women's economic, social, and political empowerment. A more intersectional approach is required to account for the diverse experiences of women from different socio-economic backgrounds, regions, and communities. Policies should be designed in consultation with women from all walks of life, ensuring that their voices are integral to the policymaking process (Srinivasan, 2005).

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