



# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (D.E.I.) in Indian Organizations: A Study of Ground Level Metrics

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## Abstract

This review article examines the existing state of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) practices in Indian organizations, with particular emphasis on ground-level implementation metrics. Drawing from contemporary research and organizational practices, the study identified gap between policy frameworks and practical implementation of DEI initiatives across Indian corporate, public sector and social enterprises. The article synthesized existing literature, highlights measurement challenges and proposes a comprehensive framework for assessing DEI effectiveness through quantifiable ground-level metrics. Findings revealed that while Indian organizations adopt DEI policies, significant disparities existed in implementation, particularly concerning caste, gender, regional diversity and disability inclusion. The study recommends evidence-based metrics and accountability mechanisms to strengthen DEI outcomes in the Indian organizational context.

**Keywords:** Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Indian Organizations, DEI Metrics, Workplace Diversity & Organizational Justice.

## 1. Introduction

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) has emerged as a critical structural imperative in the 21st century, transcending mere compliance to become a strategic business advantage. In the Indian context, DEI assumes unique dimensions shaped by the country's complex social fabric encompassing caste hierarchies, religious pluralism, linguistic diversity, gender disparities and regional differences. Unlike Western conceptualizations of diversity primarily focused on race and ethnicity, Indian organizations must navigate a multi-layered diversity landscape rooted in centuries-old social structures and

contemporary socio-economic realities. The impetus for DEI in Indian organizations stems from multiple sources: constitutional mandates for equality and non-discrimination, legislative frameworks such as the Privileges under Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) and the Erotic Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013), corporate governance requirements and increasingly, stakeholder expectations including investors, employees and consumers. Furthermore, India's integration into global value chains has necessitated alignment with international DEI standards and reporting frameworks. Despite growing awareness and policy adoption, a significant implementation gap persists. Many Indian organizations have established DEI policies on paper but struggle with meaningful implementation at ground level. This disconnect between aspiration and reality raises critical questions about measurement, accountability and effectiveness of DEI initiatives. Ground-level metrics—quantifiable indicators that capture actual experiences and outcomes of diverse employees—remain inadequately developed and inconsistently applied across Indian organizations. This review article systematically examines existing research on DEI in Indian organizations, identifies critical research gaps particularly concerning measurable ground-level indicators and proposes a comprehensive framework for assessing DEI implementation effectiveness. By focusing on actionable metrics rather than declarative policies, this study targets to back to more evidence-based and outcome-oriented DEI practices in the Indian organizational landscape.

## 2. Significance of the Study

This study holds substantial theoretical, practical and social significance for multiple stakeholders in the Indian organizational ecosystem.

### 2.1 Theoretical Aspects

From an academic perspective, this review addresses a notable gap in structural behavior and management of humans as management literature specific to the Indian context. Utmost DEI research originates from Western contexts, with frameworks and metrics designed for societies with different diversity dimensions. This study contributes to developing indigenous theoretical frameworks that account for India's unique social stratification systems, particularly caste-based discrimination, which remains underexplored in mainstream management literature. By synthesizing scattered research on Indian DEI practices and proposing context-specific metrics, this work advances scholarly understanding of how global DEI principles can be localized and measured in diverse cultural contexts.

### 2.2 Applied Significance

For practitioners including HR professionals, organizational leaders and DEI specialists, this study provides actionable insights into measuring and improving DEI outcomes. The focus on ground-level metrics moves beyond superficial diversity counts to examine actual inclusion experiences, equity in opportunities and systemic barriers. Organizations can utilize the proposed framework to audit their

current DEI status, identify implementation gaps and establish evidence-based interventions. Additionally, the study offers guidance for multinational corporations operating in India seeking to align global DEI standards with local realities.

### 2.3 Communal Significance

Given India's developmental aspirations and commitment to inclusive growth, organizational DEI practices have broader societal implications. Organizations serve as critical sites for social change, potentially disrupting discriminatory patterns and creating equitable opportunities. Effective DEI implementation in organizations can contribute to reducing persistent inequalities based on caste, gender, religion, disability and other marginalized identities. By highlighting implementation challenges and proposing measurable solutions, this study supports the larger project of building a more equitable and inclusive society. Furthermore, as India positions itself as a global economic power, demonstrating robust DEI practices enhances the country's reputation and attractiveness for international partnerships and investments.

### 2.4 Policy Significance

For policymakers and regulatory bodies, this research provides evidence on the effectiveness of existing legislative and regulatory frameworks concerning workplace diversity and inclusion. Insights from ground-level metrics can inform policy refinements, enforcement mechanisms and reporting requirements. The study also contributes to ongoing debates about reservation policies, affirmative action and other equity-promoting interventions in the corporate sector.

## 3. Review of Literature

The related literature has been reviewed to reach on certain conclusions:

### 3.1 Conceptual Foundations of DEI

Rawls' (1971) theory of justice provides philosophical foundations, emphasizing fair distribution of opportunities and resources, particularly favoring disadvantaged groups. In organizational contexts, equity manifests through fair compensation, unbiased promotion systems, equitable work assignments and recognition of differential starting points among employees. Thomas and Ely (1996) distinguished between various diversity paradigms: discrimination-and-fairness, access-and-legitimacy and learning-and-effectiveness, with the latter emphasizing diversity as a resource for organizational learning and adaptation. Beyond equality, equity acknowledges that different people need different resources and assistance to get similar results. The degree to which people feel appreciated at work place is a measure of inclusion. Shore *et al.* (2011) proposed that inclusion comprises two dimensions: belongingness (feeling part of critical organizational processes) and uniqueness (being valued for one's distinctive attributes). Ferdman (2014) emphasized that inclusion requires both individual experiences of being included and organizational practices that foster inclusive climates.

### 3.2 DEI in the Indian Perspective

India's diversity landscape differs fundamentally from Western contexts, necessitating adapted conceptual frameworks. Ghai (2002) attributed this to attitudinal barriers, infrastructural inadequacies and lack of awareness about reasonable accommodations.

Budhwar *et al.* (2005) examined work-life balance challenges faced by Indian women professionals, noting cultural expectations of prioritizing family responsibilities. Attewell (2007) documented persistent caste-based discrimination in hiring practices through experimental studies, revealing that applicants with lower-caste surnames received significantly fewer call backs than those with upper-caste surnames, even with identical qualifications. Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) found that women in Indian organizations frequently encounter glass ceiling effects, limited access to informal networks and stereotyping that questions their commitment and leadership capabilities. Despite increasing female labor force participation, women remain severely underrepresented in leadership positions across sectors. Radhakrishnan (2011) explored how linguistic hierarchies intersect with class markers, affecting workplace interactions and career progression. Dhattiwala and Biggs (2012) documented how communal tensions and stereotyping affect hiring and promotion decisions, often unconsciously. Regional and linguistic diversity, while celebrated in Indian discourse, creates practical challenges in organizational settings. Organizations based in metropolitan centers often privilege English and Hindi, marginalizing employees from non-Hindi speaking regions. Srinivas (2013) highlighted that caste remains a significant yet often invisible diversity dimension in Indian organizations, creating subtle and overt barriers despite constitutional prohibitions against caste-based discrimination. Thorat and Gender diversity in Indian organizations reflects broader societal patriarchal structures.

### 3.3 DEI Implementation and Barriers

Organizational culture and informal networks profoundly influence inclusion experiences. Chattopadhyay *et al.* (2004) identified that minority employees often face exclusion from informal networks critical for information access, mentorship and career advancement. Homophily, tendency to associate with others reinforces existing power structures and limits opportunities for diverse employees. Research on DEI implementation in Indian organizations reveals a pattern of policy-practice gaps. However, Nishii and Özbilgin (2007) cautioned that leadership rhetoric must be accompanied by structural changes to avoid creating cynicism among employees. In the Indian context, Deshpande and Newman (2007) found evidence of implicit caste bias even among educated professionals who explicitly endorse egalitarian values. Such biases infiltrate recruitment, performance evaluation, promotion decisions and everyday workplace interactions.

Varma and Budhwar (2012) found that while many Indian companies have diversity policies, implementation mechanisms remain weak, lacking dedicated resources, accountability systems and integration with core business processes. DEI is often relegated to symbolic initiatives around specific

observance days rather than embedded in organizational culture. Unconscious bias represents a significant barrier to DEI effectiveness. Banaji and Greenwald (2013) popularized the concept of implicit bias such as unconscious attitudes and stereotypes affecting decisions and behaviors. Leadership commitment emerges as a critical factor across studies. Kossek *et al.* (2017) demonstrated that DEI initiatives succeed when senior leadership demonstrates visible commitment through resource allocation, personal involvement and linking DEI outcomes to business performance.

### 3.4 Measuring DEI: Metrics and Frameworks

The measurement of DEI has evolved from simple demographic counts to sophisticated multi-dimensional frameworks. Diversity metrics traditionally focused on representation percentages across demographic categories at various organizational levels. However, scholars increasingly recognize that representation alone provides limited insight into equity and inclusion. Roberson (2006) emphasized measuring perceived organizational support for diversity and fairness in human resource practices. Equity metrics examine outcome disparities across demographic groups in compensation, promotion rates, performance ratings, attrition and access to developmental opportunities. Such metrics reveal whether organizational systems produce equitable outcomes or perpetuate advantages for dominant groups. Pay equity analyses, for instance, assess compensation disparities controlling for relevant factors like experience, education and performance. In the Indian context, few organizations systematically measure DEI using comprehensive frameworks. Bhatnagar (2007) noted that Indian companies typically track basic diversity ratios, particularly gender ratios mandated by corporate governance codes, but rarely examine deeper equity and inclusion indicators. Caste-based data collection remains controversial, with organizations hesitant to gather such information despite its relevance for understanding workplace inequality. Nishii (2013) developed validated scales measuring inclusion climate, assessing perceptions of fair treatment, integration of differences and decision-making inclusiveness.

Mor Barak *et al.* (2016) proposed a comprehensive DEI measurement framework encompassing multiple levels like diversity attitudes, inclusion experiences), group (team diversity composition, group dynamics, policies, representation, climate and societal. This multi-level approach recognizes that DEI operates through nested systems requiring assessment at each level. Inclusion metrics have gained prominence, recognizing that diverse representation without inclusion creates tokenism rather than genuine integration.

### 3.5 Global DEI Trends and Best Practices

Examining global DEI practices provides valuable insights for the Indian context. In the United States, organizations increasingly utilize data analytics and artificial intelligence to identify bias patterns in recruitment, retention and advancement.

Crenshaw (1989) introduced this concept to explain how race and gender intersect to create distinct discrimination experiences for Black women. In organizational contexts, intersectionality frameworks challenge single-axis diversity approaches, recognizing that a gender diversity initiative, for example, may primarily benefit privileged-caste women while leaving marginalized women behind. Terjesen *et al.* (2015) found that countries with gender quota regulations showed significant increases in women's board representation, though questions remain about broader organizational impacts. Intersectionality, which is recognizing that individuals hold multiple intersecting identities creating unique experiences such as gained traction in DEI discourse. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) represent a common best practice globally, providing affinity-based communities for mutual support, professional development and organizational advocacy. Welbourne *et al.* (2017) found that effective ERGs contribute to increased inclusion, retention and employee engagement, particularly when supported with resources and leadership access. However, ERGs in Indian organizations remain rare, possibly reflecting cultural discomfort with identity-based organizing. Raghavan *et al.* (2020) discussed how algorithmic tools can audit organizational processes for fairness, though cautioning about potential algorithmic bias reproduction. European approaches to DEI often emphasize regulatory compliance combined with social responsibility frameworks. The European Union's gender diversity directives have prompted organizations to implement gender quotas on corporate boards, demonstrating that regulatory mandates can accelerate diversity progress.

### 3.6 Recent Developments and Emerging Themes

Recent literature emphasizes moving from compliance-based to strategic DEI approaches. Konrad *et al.* (2018) argued that organizations achieve superior outcomes when DEI is framed as a business imperative linked to innovation, market expansion, talent acquisition and organizational reputation rather than merely fulfilling legal obligations. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities, prompting renewed DEI attention. Bhambra *et al.* (2020) documented how the pandemic disproportionately affected marginalized communities, with implications for workplace DEI. Remote work, while offering flexibility, also created new inclusion challenges around visibility, access to informal interactions and work-life boundaries differentially impacting caregivers, predominantly women. Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) frameworks have elevated DEI importance for investors and stakeholders. Serafeim (2020) demonstrated that organizations with strong ESG performance, including diversity metrics, achieve better financial returns and lower risk profiles. This business case for DEI has prompted Indian organizations, particularly those accessing global capital markets, to enhance DEI reporting and practices.

## 4. Research Gap

Despite growing DEI research in Indian contexts, several critical gaps persist, particularly concerning ground-level implementation metrics. While discussion of the above mentioned research paper, it has been noted that there is Lack of Comprehensive, Context-Specific Metrics, Limited Integration of Caste

as a Diversity Dimension, Insufficient Focus on Intersectionality, Limited Evidence on Inclusion Experiences, Gap Between Multinational Corporation (MNC) and Domestic Organization Practices, Absence of Longitudinal Studies, Limited Research on DEI and Organizational Performance Linkages, Inadequate Attention to Disability Inclusion. Thus, the review article addresses these gaps by proposing a comprehensive framework of ground-level DEI metrics tailored to the Indian context, drawing on available literature while identifying areas requiring further empirical investigation.

## 5. Methods of Research

### 5.1 Research Scheme

A methodical literature review approach has been used in present research work combined with a conceptual analysis to examine DEI practices and metrics in Indian organizations. The systematic review follows guidelines established by Tranfield *et al.* (2003) for management research, ensuring transparent, replicable and comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge. The conceptual analysis component develops a theoretical framework for ground-level DEI metrics based on synthesized literature, existing measurement approaches and contextual considerations specific to Indian organizations.

### 5.2 Techniques for Searing Related Literature

A thorough search of the literature was carried out using several databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, JSTOR, PubMed, EBSC Ohost, Google Scholar and Indian databases such as IndianJournals.com and Shodhganga. The search strategy employed Boolean operators combining key terms related to diversity, equity, inclusion, Indian organizations, workplace. The search covered publications from 2000 to 2024, capturing contemporary DEI discourse while including seminal earlier works. Both peer-reviewed academic articles and grey literature (organizational reports, policy documents, industry surveys) were included to provide comprehensive coverage of research and practice.

### 5.4 Study Selection Process

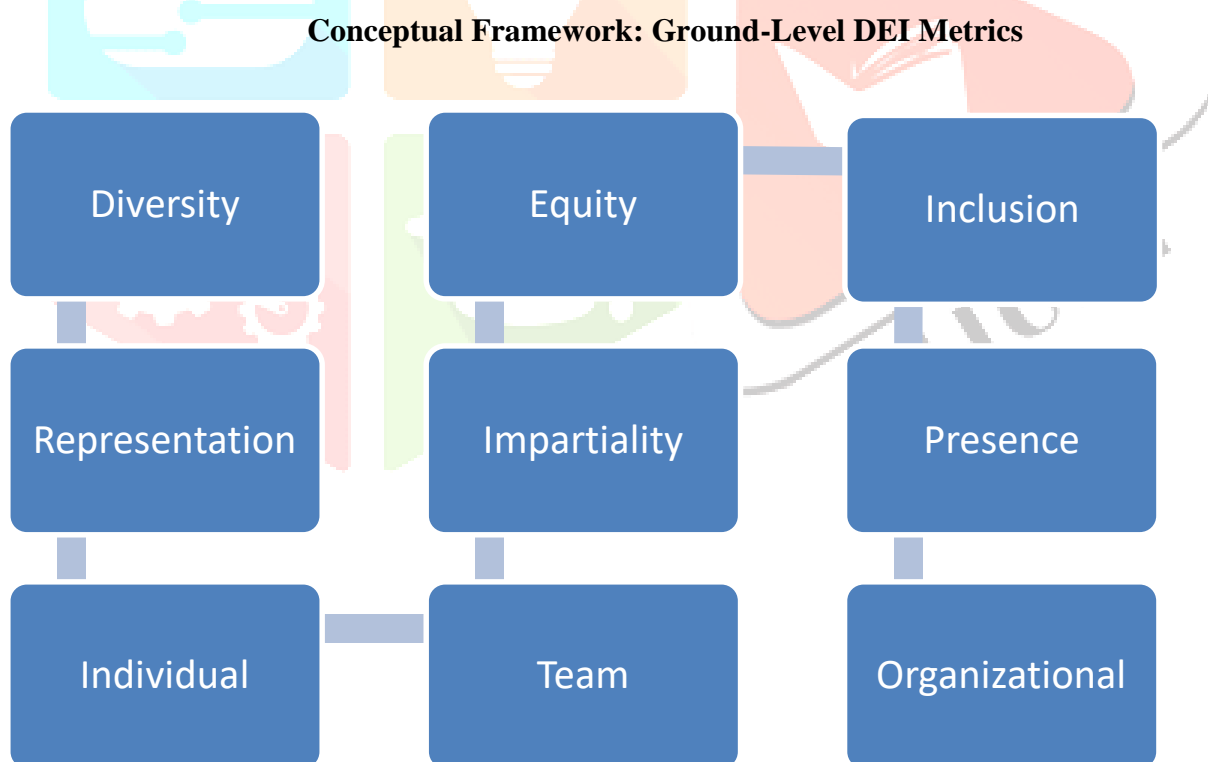
The initial search yielded relevant publications. After removing duplicates, publications were screened for relevance and full-text review was carried out. Following detailed assessment against inclusion criteria, organizational reports and policy documents from leading Indian companies, industry associations and government bodies were included to study practice being made in DEI.

## 5.5 Acquisition and Analysis of Data

For each research taken for the study, necessary evidence was take out such as author(s), publication year, research objectives, theoretical framework, methodology, sample characteristics, diversity dimensions examined, DEI metrics/measures used, key findings and recommendations. This information was organized in a structured database facilitating systematic analysis. Thematic exploration was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns and gaps across the literature. Studies were characterized by diversity dimension, organizational sector, methodology and focus (policy vs. practice vs. outcomes). This categorization enabled identification of well-researched areas and significant gaps requiring attention.

## 5.6. Conceptual Framework: Ground-Level DEI Metrics for Indian Organizations

Based on the literature review and analysis of research gaps, this section presents a comprehensive conceptual framework for measuring DEI implementation at ground level in Indian organizations. The framework is organized across three dimensions such as, Representation, Impartiality and Presence and four organizational levels like Individual, Team, Organizational and External.



**Figure-1**

## 6. Research Objectives

Considering the review of the literature, identified gaps and study pursues the following research objectives:

- (a). To review existing research on DEI practices in Indian organizations.
- (b). To study state of DEI measurement practices among Indian organizations, identifying commonly tracked metrics and measurement gaps.

## 8. Sources of Information

This review article draws on diverse information sources to ensure comprehensive coverage of DEI research and practice in Indian organizations:

### 8.1 Academic Databases and Journals

- Web of Science
- Scopus
- JSTOR
- EBSCO host (Business Source Complete, Academic Search Complete)
- PubMed
- Pro Quest Dissertations and Theses
- Google Scholar
- Indian academic databases: IndianJournals.com, Shodhganga

The Journal of Business Ethics, Human Resource Management, Organization Science, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, Economic and Political Weekly, Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, South Asian Journal of Business and Management Cases, and IIMB Management Review are important journals that frequently publish DEI research pertinent to India.

## 9. Discussion

Literature reveals a substantial policy-practice gap in Indian organizations. While an increasing number of organizations, particularly large corporations and MNC subsidiaries, have adopted DEI policies, actual implementation at ground level remains inconsistent and often superficial. Organizations tend to focus on visible, easily measurable aspects such as gender ratios in workforce composition while neglecting deeper systemic issues affecting equity and inclusion. Many organizations treat DEI as an exercise or public relations creativity rather embedding it into core business strategy and culture. DEI committees exist on paper but often lack decision-making authority, dedicated budgets, or clear accountability mechanisms. As a result, policies remain declarative statements without translating into

changed behaviors, processes or outcomes for diverse employees. It has been calculated that Gender diversity, particularly women's representation, constitutes the predominant DEI focus in Indian organizations. This emphasis stems from regulatory drivers including corporate governance codes mandating women directors on boards, increased investor attention to gender metrics in ESG frameworks and relatively lower social sensitivity compared to other diversity dimensions like caste or religion. However, even within gender diversity, implementation remains uneven. Organizations have made progress in entry-level hiring of women but face persistent challenges in retention and advancement to leadership positions. The intersectional experiences of women from marginalized caste, religious, or regional backgrounds receive minimal attention. Perhaps the most significant finding is the near-complete absence of caste as an acknowledged diversity dimension in private sector organizations. Unlike government organizations where reservation policies mandate representation, private sector companies typically do not collect caste data, include caste in diversity frameworks, or acknowledge caste-based disparities in their workforce. This invisibility persists despite research evidence documenting caste-based discrimination in hiring, workplace interactions and career progression. The social stigma attached to caste identity, particularly lower-caste identity, discourages voluntary disclosure. Organizations fear that explicitly addressing caste might create divisions or legal liabilities. However, this silence perpetuates structural inequalities and denies experiences of discrimination faced by employees from marginalized caste backgrounds. Some organizations attempt to address socio-economic diversity as a proxy, focusing on first-generation professionals or employees from lower-income backgrounds. Representation of persons with disabilities in private sector employment is very less. Organizations cite challenges including physical accessibility barriers, lack of awareness about reasonable accommodations, concerns about productivity and stereotypes about capabilities of persons with disabilities.

## 10. Fate of DEI

Organizations and researchers must develop indigenous frameworks accounting for these contextual realities while maintaining alignment with universal principles of human dignity and equality. By systematically measuring representation, equity and inclusion across multiple dimensions and organizational levels, organizations can identify specific disparities, design targeted interventions, establish accountability and track progress over time. Organizational leaders must elevate DEI to strategic priority with corresponding resource allocation and accountability. HR professionals need specialized expertise in DEI implementation and measurement. Policymakers should strengthen regulatory frameworks while incentivizing voluntary excellence. Researchers must address critical knowledge gaps through rigorous, ethically conducted studies. Individual employees can contribute through daily inclusive behaviors and collective action. As India aspires to position itself as a global economic power and developed nation, ensuring that growth and opportunity are inclusive rather than concentrated among privileged groups becomes critical. By implementing comprehensive, measured

DEI practices, Indian organizations can contribute to building a more equitable society while simultaneously strengthening their own performance and sustainability.

## 11. Conclusion

This comprehensive review of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Indian organizations reveals a landscape of progress alongside persistent challenges. While awareness of DEI importance has been increased particularly in large corporations and technology sector organizations, substantial gaps remain between policy adoption and ground-level implementation. Indian organizations focus predominantly on gender diversity while largely ignoring other significant diversity dimensions, particularly caste, which remains virtually invisible in corporate DEI frameworks despite its profound influence on workplace inequality. The measurement practices emphasize superficial representation metrics than equity outcomes or inclusion experiences, limiting organizations' ability to identify and address systemic barriers. Implementation gaps stem from inadequate leadership commitment, unconscious biases, homogeneous networks and insufficient resources rather than lack of knowledge about DEI principles. Global DEI frameworks require substantial adaptation to address India's unique diversity landscape. Caste-based stratification, religious plurality, linguistic diversity and intersections among these dimensions create complexities not captured in Western diversity models centered on race and ethnicity.

The journey toward truly diverse, equitable and inclusive Indian organizations remains long, requiring patience, persistence, courage and commitment. However, the framework, recommendations and growing body of knowledge synthesized in this review provide pathways forward. The question is not whether DEI is relevant or important for Indian organizations, evidences clearly affirms it is, however, whether stakeholders will commit to the difficult, sustained work of translating awareness into action and aspiration into reality is a question to be answered.

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