

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SYSTEMATIC REDUCTION IN GENDER INEQUALITY

P. NISHITHA¹, Dr.P.ROOPA² and Dr.M.GIRIKUMARI³

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Business Management, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati,
Email: nishithareddy511@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of Business Management, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati
Email: roopauday.p@gmail.com

³Assistant Professor, Department of Basic Science and Humanities, School of Engineering & Technology, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati.
Email: mgiribalaji@gmail.com

Abstract

Women's empowerment may be defined in several ways, including accepting women's viewpoints, making an effort to seek them and raising the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training. Empowerment here means women gaining more power to control their life and take their own decisions in their self-interest. Such empowerment is possible only by reducing the gender inequality, where men and women are treated equally. Discrimination against women has become common in almost every part of the world, though the extent of discrimination varies. Gender equality is considered as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), as per the United Nations General Assembly in the year 2015. World Economic Forum (WEF) is an international organisation which brings together every year leaders in the field of business and politics to discuss major political, economic, environmental and social challenges faced by the world. This forum since the year 2006 is publishing Global Gender Gap Report. The Global Gender Gap Index is an index framed by the WEF and it measures gender equality. This paper addresses issues in this report.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Social Sustainability Goals, Gender Equality, World Economic Forum.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is a dynamic process which enable people to get control over their life. It is a process that gives power to the people to make their own choices and have definite opinion on various aspects which impact their wellbeing. Women empowerment is the most discussed topic because of continuous disadvantage women has in comparison to men. This disadvantage can be seen in all areas, namely political, economic, social and cultural life especially in a developing nation like India. Empowerment here means women gaining more power to control their life and take their own decisions in their self-interest. Such empowerment is possible only by reducing the gender inequality, where men and women are treated equally. Discrimination against women has become common in almost every part of the world, though the extent of discrimination varies. For women to be empowered it is necessary that they are treated on par with men and given equal opportunity to prosper. However, gender inequality has become a reality in some form or the other in almost every country in the world.

As this has become a grave problem, gender equality is considered as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), as per the United Nations General Assembly in the year 2015. These goals constitute a collection of 17 global goals which applies to every Nation to attain

sustainable and better future to all. Gender Equality is sustainable goal number 5 (SDG 5) which aims to bring down the disparity among men and women.

So, gender equality signifies that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities available to all the individuals are same and it must not depend on the gender. Equal rights to women are important when we talk of empowering them.

1.1 GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT

World Economic Forum (WEF) is an international organisation which brings together every year leaders in the field of business and politics to discuss major political, economic, environmental and social challenges faced by the world. This forum since the year 2006 is publishing Global Gender Gap Report. The Global Gender Gap Index is an index framed by the WEF and it measures gender equality.

The Global Gender Gap index has earmarked 156 countries across the world in 2021. According to the research it was understood that it will take nearly 135.6 years to actually bridge the gap between men and women worldwide. It is also revealed that the impact of COVID 19 pandemic was felt more severely by women than men.

The index is based on four main parameters which are economic participation, educational attainment, health and political empowerment. According to this report of the above four parameters the gender gap is largest with regard to political empowerment and it will take many years to bridge the gap. The next largest gender gap is found in the parameter economic participation and opportunity and it will almost take 267.6 years to close this gap. The gap is more in this parameter because few women hold key managerial and leadership positions compared to men and their participation in labour force is also less. The gender gap and disparity are the lowest in educational attainment and health.

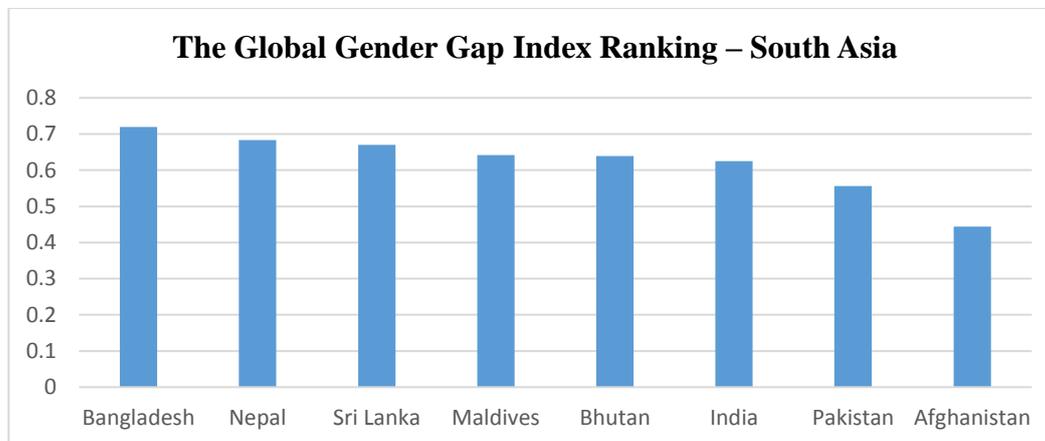
The table below shows the position of India in the among South Asian Countries:

Table 1: Ranking of the Global Gender Gap Index – South Asia

Country	Regional Rank	Global Rank	Score
Bangladesh	1	65	0.72
Nepal	2	106	0.68
Sri Lanka	3	116	0.67
Maldives	4	128	0.64
Bhutan	5	130	0.64
India	6	140	0.63
Pakistan	7	153	0.56
Afghanistan	8	156	0.44

Source: Source: Global Gender Gap Report

Graph: 1



Source: Source: Global Gender Gap Report

This report has revealed many shocking realities about India, has brought into light the fact that India has to go a long way to attain the goal of Gender Equality. India is now one of the worst performers in South Asia and is ranked 140 out of 156 countries. In the year 2006 India’s rank was 98. Ranks of most of our neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan were better than India. According to the report India has closed only 62.5% of the gender gap till now.

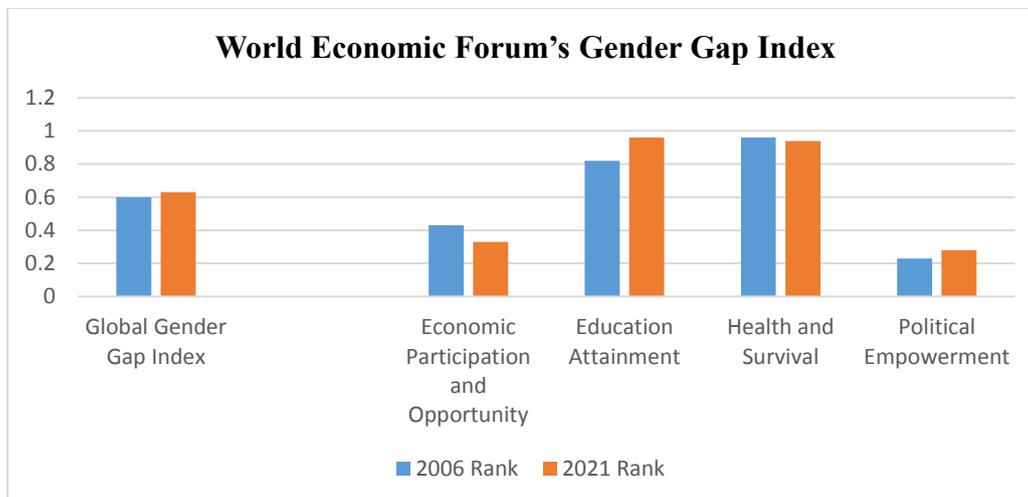
The following table and graph show the rank of India in these parameters in 2006 and 2021:

Table 2: Global Gender Gap Index

	2006 Rank	2006 score	2021 Rank	2021 score
Global Gender Gap Index	98	0.601	140	0.625
Economic Participation and Opportunity	110	0.397	151	0.326
Education Attainment	102	0.819	114	0.962
Health and Survival	103	0.962	155	0.937
Political Empowerment	20	0.227	51	0.276

Source: Global Gender Gap Report

Graph: 2



Source: Global Gender Gap Report

Global gender gap report is published almost every year and it shows the gender gap index of almost all the countries of the world. The above table shows the global gender gap index rank of India in 2021, it is compared to the rank in the year 2006 to know the change in different parameters studied.

It is evident from the above table that though overall performance showed slight improvement from 2006 Rank (0.60). The improvement was very minimal considering the fact that there is 15 years gap between the ranks. It was very shocking to see that performance of India has diminished drastically in the parameter Economic Participation and Opportunity. This is mainly because of inadequate representation of women in leadership roles and of course decrease in women's work force participation. There is decrease in the women share in senior managerial positions since our country have only few women managers at higher level in comparison to their male counterpart. Further there is still a lot of disparity in the income earned by men and women in India. It is estimated that Indian women earn only one fifth of the men's earnings.

India has fared very poorly on health and survival parameter, ranking at 155, which implies that the health of women in India is a matter of grave concern. Though the rank for political empowerment showed slight improvement, but still women representation in politics is much below many other nations.

The only parameter in which India has improved its performance is Education Attainment. It implies that most of the girls in India are getting educated and also enrolling for higher education in India.

1.2 POSITION OF INDIA IN DIFFERENT PARAMETERS AS PER GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT:

1.2.1. Economic Participation and Opportunity

1. **Women Participation in Labour Force:** Women participation in workforce has drastically come down from 26% in 2005 to 20.3% in 2019 according to World Bank estimates. The unemployment rate among women is around 15.8% which is more compared to their male counterparts which is around 12.6% during July to September 2020. This data indicated that the impact of pandemic was felt more by women than men. It is further understood that 10.7% of women in India have ownership rights over firms in India. Further only 8.9% of female hold key managerial positions in firms in India.
2. **Ownership of Property:** As per Section 8 of Hindu Succession Act 1956, daughters in India have the same right on the father's property as the sons. As per NFHS – 5 report for 2019-20, around 41.6% of women own a house or land alone or jointly. In India around. In India, most of the women, that is around 87% are dependent on agriculture, but only 10.3% of women own land. Women also mostly inherit the property as widows than as daughters. It was found that, the patriarchal system is the main reason behind gender-based discrimination in property rights. Majority of the women are hesitant to talk about their rights and do not have the support of the family when they go to court. Hence, they are reluctant to take a legal route and the best way to make them talk about their rights is in educating women and creating awareness about their rights.
3. **Gender Pay Gap:** According to the Monster Salary Index Survey, Indian Women earn 19% less than men and 60% of women feel there is discrimination at work. The ILO's Global Wage Report 2018/19 found that the average pay gender gap is in India is 34.5%. This gender pay gap is more in IT Sector, since men earn 26% more than women followed by manufacturing sector (24%) and health care sector (21%). It is lowest in banking and insurance sector where men earn only 2% more than women. Further women occupy only 17% in Board of Directors in Indian corporate. This shows that India it will take a long time for India to overcome this pay disparity among men and women.

1.2.2. Education Attainment

1. **Literacy level of Women:** Literacy is a strong indicator of the growth and development of a nation. India's literacy rate as on 2021 is 74.04% which is good compared to what it was in 2011 (65.38%). However, we are still lagging behind the world average literacy rate which is 84%. There is a still lot of disparity in the literacy rate of men and women. The literacy rate for men is stands at 82.14% whereas for women it is around 65.46%. However, there is some improvement in this area compared to previous years.
2. **Educational Status of Women in India:** There is a reduction in the gap between the enrolment of boys and girls in higher educational institutions in India and it is a good

sign. It is understood that almost 49% of the students enrolling in colleges are now girls, according to the latest All India Survey on Higher Education. The survey for 2019-20, indicated that there is 11.4% growth in the overall student enrolment in higher education from 2015-16 to 2019-20. Further it was also noted that there was 18.2% increase in the female enrolment during 2015-16 to 2019-20 which is a very positive sign.

1.2.3. Health and Survival

Health is another very important indicator and it includes psychological health as well. Nutrition has a significant role in overall health of a person. Unfortunately, India has a record of the highest rate of malnourished women among the developing countries of the world. Most of the pregnant women are found to suffer from malnutrition and iron deficiency and it affects the health of the child. It was noted that around 70% of the world's breast cancer cases are coming from developing countries and of that nearly one fifth cases are from India. Lack of proper maternal health affects the health of the child. Another shocking fact is that India records for nearly 20 percent of all maternal deaths worldwide between 1992 and 2006. In order to address the problem of maternal health care need of women across India, many national health programmes such as the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and the Family Welfare Programme have been started by the Government of India.

1.2.4. Political Empowerment

The term 'political participation' is not only related to 'Right to Vote', but also relates to participation political activism, political awareness, decision-making process, political etc. In India, women participate in voting and contest elections but their number is very much less than men. To overcome this gender inequality in politics, the Government of India, has decided to reserve seats for women in local bodies.

1.3 GOVERNEMENT INITIATIVES TO REDUCE GENDER DISPARITY

Indian constitution does not in any way discriminate between men and women. It is very clear that the Article 15 and 16 of Indian constitution have stressed on equal rights for both men and women. However, India has not made much improvement in this area over the years. In order to improve its score in Global Gender Gap Index, Ministry of Women and Child Development has adopted two main strategies, which are:

- To monitor the performance of India by engaging with World Economic Forum.
- Identifying areas where reform has to be made and actions need to be taken in consultation with the concerned Ministries and Departments.

Some initiatives taken by Government are as follows:

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme to educate citizens against gender discrimination and provide for welfare of girl child.
2. Establishment of Working women's hostel for safe accommodation of working women.

3. Swadhar to provide rehabilitation to destitute women.
4. To make rural women self-reliant and to provide a means of income generation, support to Training and Employment Program for Women (STEP) has been set up
5. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) is established to provide micro finance services for economic upliftment of women and make them self-reliant.
6. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) is set up to promote all round development of women.
7. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) was set up in notified backward areas for girls belonging to disadvantaged groups.
8. To give ownership rights of property to women, Government has announced Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana which aims to provide housing under the name of the woman.
9. Mission Poshan 2.0 is introduced as a flagship programme to the health of women.
10. To promote women entrepreneurship, programmes like Stand-Up India and Entrepreneurship and Skill Development Programme (ESSDP) are established.
11. Similarly Mahila e-Haat programme was initiated by Government which is an online marketing platform to support women entrepreneur/SHGs/NGOs.
12. To provide access to institutional finance like micro finance for small businesses, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) was initiated.
13. Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram aims to overcome expenses for pregnant women delivering infants at public health institutions.
14. Government has also established Women's helpline to provide 24 hours emergency response to women affected by violence.
15. To provide help pregnant women by improve their health, and providing them with required nutrition, Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) Scheme is implemented as Maternity Benefit for pregnant and lactating women.
16. To encourage women participation in politics from the grass root level, government has reserved 33% seats in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

1.4 CONCLUSION:

It is observed that gender equality is still a dream in India. Though India has improved in the area of education and literacy level of women over the years, there are many areas which still need attention. They are, more representation of women in higher level managerial posts in corporate sector, more representation in politics, and equal pay for equal work in all areas, which allows women to get same remuneration as men. These steps would surely improve India's score in Global Gender Gap Index at the same time aid in women empowerment. Though India has progressed economically, the country must to pay attention to social development of women. Women empowerment is possible only when men and women have

equal opportunities in the areas of education, healthcare, jobs, politics, economic participation and personal development.

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