

## **GENDER GAP INDEX: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF INDIA'S POSITION AND PROGRESS**

By

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### **Abstract**

*Are men and women equal here? It's been great to ask while we live in India, the largest democratic country in the World. The truth is that in a complex country where customs, beliefs, power, and rights are all confused, the gender gap is dangerously growing high. This year too the World Economic Forum is reminding us about the growing gender gap in the country. In 2021, India ranks 140th out of 156 countries in Global Gender Gap Index. Its noteworthy as compared to 2020, India stands 28 places behind in Global Gender Index. Despite a high economic growth and surfeit of government measures to create gender equality in the country, gender gap still exists. It has been widely argued that "Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world". This article evaluates the gender gap that still persist in India and the reasons for the increasing gender inequality. The rising Gender Inequality will be a challenge to the sustainable development of India. Therefore, the Government must plan and implement effective policies to reduce the mounting gender inequality.*

**Keywords:** gender inequality, gender gap, global gender index, discrimination.

### **Introduction**

Despite achieving high rates of economic growth in the recent years the problem of gender inequality or gender gap continues to be a huge issue of apprehension. People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. This learned behaviour makes up gender identity and determines gender roles. According to World Health

Organization "gender" is used to describe the characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed, while sex refers to those that are biologically determined. Hence gender refers to the social, cultural and psychological difference between men and women. Gender inequality is the idea and situation that the men and women are not treated equal. Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment or perceptions of individual

wholly or partly due to their gender (Wood, 2002). Gender inequality has been prevalent in all societies for centuries and continues to exist even today. Discrimination against women and girls is a persistent and long-running phenomenon that characterises Indian society at every level. Discrimination against women takes place in several forms such as female foeticide, practice of dowry, dowry related violence against women etc. In developed countries gender discrimination can be in the form of wage differences in the labour market whereas in developing economies it takes the form of differential access to education, health and wage employment (Collier, 1994). "Missing Women" a term popularised by the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen simply jagged out the problem of gender inequality in the country. In his essay entitled "Many faces of Gender Inequality" Sen Upstretched the alarming situation of the anti-female bias in crude birth rate in India based on 2001 Census report.

Gender inequality is one of the major challenges of India's policymakers, who are trying to achieve 'faster, sustainable, and more inclusive growth'. For growth to be inclusive, the

people, irrespective of gender, must have the opportunity to participate productively in the economic growth process (Ghosh, 2018). One of the eight goals of Millennium Development Goals was to promote gender equality and women empowerment. Gender equality in workforce participation is obligatory to achieve inclusive growth in the country. Gender equality, also branded as sexual equality, is the state of equal comfort of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making and the state of valuing different behaviours, ambitions and needs equally, nevertheless of gender. High female labour participation can promote economic growth by contributing to household income. There often exist a negative relationship between gender inequality in education and economic growth. Educating the females will have a positive impact on next generation's education, reducing the fertility rate and infant mortality rate. Educated women will often be a part of earning members which will be a significant contribution to the economic growth.

## **Global Gender Gap Index**

The global gender gap index is used to measure gender inequality. There are over three hundred different indicators used to measure gender equality. The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) developed by the World Economic Forum in 2006 and has been published yearly since 2006. The Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks the evolution of gender-based gaps among four key dimensions along with its 14 sub indicators. The four key dimensions include Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment and tracks progress towards closing these gaps over time. The economic participation and opportunity index consists of (a) the participation gap (measured in terms of the difference between women and men in labour force participation rates), (b) the remuneration gap (measured in terms of the ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income, and a qualitative indicator measuring wage equality for similar work), and (c) the advancement gap (captured by the ratio of women-to-men among legislators, senior officials and managers, and the ratio of women-to-men in technical and professional

workers). The educational attainment index measures the gap between women and men in education in terms of the female-to-male ratio in the literacy rate, and primary, secondary and tertiary education. The health and survival gap index is constructed using two indicators, sex-ratio at birth as a measure of the phenomenon of "missing women" due to a strong son preference in many countries, and the ratio of women-to-men in life expectancy. The political empowerment gap index is constructed using the ratios of women-to-men in minister-level and parliamentary positions (World Economic Forum). These dimensions are interrelated. The progress in one dimension can bring about change in other and vice versa. This year the Economic Forum targeted 156 countries to prepare the index. Iceland is the most gender-equal country in the world for the 12th time (GGG Index, 2021).

## **Sustainable Development Goals and Gender Equality**

The Sustainable Development Goals also known as Global Goals comprehends the achievement of three interconnected objectives, i.e., economic development, social inclusion, and environmental

sustainability which are necessary for the well-being of individuals and societies. SDGs address the global challenges faced by the people including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. It was initiated in 2015, in the UN conference to find out urgent solutions to the aforesaid problems and to ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. There are 17 SDGs and are integrated as they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. The ultimate objective of SDGs is to end poverty, hunger and AIDS and discrimination against women and girls.

Gender equality is included as the fifth Sustainable Development Goal. Ending all discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, it's crucial for sustainable future and it's proven that empowering women and girls helps to achieve economic growth and development. It is vital to give women equal rights land and property, sexual and reproductive health, and to technology and the internet. Today there are more women in public office than ever before, and

encouraging more women leaders will help achieve greater gender equality. Targeted goals in SDG includes the following viz (a) End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere (b) End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere (c) Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (d) Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate (e) Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences (f) Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws (g) Enhance the use of enabling

technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women (h) Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels (UNDP Report).

### **Objective of the Study and Methodology**

The present study aims to make a critical analysis of India's position in the Global Gender Gap index 2021 and to examine the ways to improve the country's position. The study also examined India's performance in each of four index and its sub- indicators in GGG Index. The study is descriptive in nature and analysis had been done using secondary data.

### **Review of Literature**

Gender equality is a vital fragment in achieving economic growth and economic development. There are several studies that have addressed issues related to gender gap. UNICEF declares that gender equality "means that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and

protections. It does not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike." Kingdon (2002) finds that girls face significantly different treatment in the intra-household allocation of education. Arora (2012) reported that, by and large, per capita income is inversely associated with gender inequality in education and health at the sub-national level in India. Evaluating the role of socio-economic and cultural factors in influencing gender differentials in schooling with district-level data from India, Rammohan & Vu (2018) found that economic development is an important factor in narrowing gender gaps in education, with richer districts more likely to educate girls than poorer districts. Dollar & Gatti (1999) opines that gender inequality in education adversely affects economic growth, as it reduces the average quota of human capital in a society by excluding qualified girls and including less qualified boys. UNFPA stated that, "despite many international agreements affirming the human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. Illiteracy and poor economic status can be observed as the root cause of the gender disparity.

## **India's Position in Global Gender Gap Index: An Analysis**

India has closed 62.5% of its gender gap to date, ranking the country 140th globally (GGG Report 2021) and has fallen 28 places in the ranking. Iceland is the most gender equal country in the world by closing 89.2 % gender gap to date. Finland is the second position followed by Norway, New Zealand and Sweden. India's position in the GGG report is very disappointing and was able to close only 62.5% of gender gap to date. India is the third worst performer in South Asia and because of its large population, India's performance has a substantial impact on the region's overall performance. Even Bangladesh, which is covered by India has eliminated 71.9 % gender gap, occupied first position among South Asian countries. For the last five years India's position in GGG report has been steadily declining. In terms of work participation in India 76% were occupied by males and that of females stood for only 23.5% in 2019. As per 2011 census the literacy gap was up to 18%.

It's big enough by looking at the four criteria for estimating the gender difference to understand the general

situation in the country. Most of the decline has occurred on the Political Empowerment subindex, where India has regressed 13.5 percentage points to reach a level of gap closed to date of just 27.6%. The main change that took place this year is the significant decline in the share of women among ministers, which halved, from 23.1% in 2019 to 9.1% in 2021 (GGG Report, 2021). Women participation also declined in economic participation and opportunity sub index. India's gender gap on this dimension widens by 3% this year, leading to a 32.6% gap closed to date. Another key reason for the increasing gender gap is that women's estimated earned income is only one-fifth of men. Discrimination against women is also reflected in Health and Survival subindex statistics. Practice of female infanticide, high incidence of gender-based sex-selective practices etc. increases the gap. In addition to this one in every four women is facing severe violence in her life time. Gender gap still persists in India in terms of literacy pointing out that one-third of the women are illiterate (34.2%) compared to 17.6% of men. Table 1 shows a comparison of the increasing gender gap in India between 2006 and 2021.

**Table 1. Global Gender Gap Index of India 2006 & 2021**

	<b>2006 Rank and Score</b>	<b>2021 Rank and Score</b>	
Global Gender Gap Index	98	0.601	140
Economic Participation and Opportunity	110	0.397	151
Educational Attainment	102	0.819	114
Health and Survival	103	0.962	155
Political Empowerment	20	0.227	51

*Source: Global Gender Gap Report, 2021 \* Score 0.00 = Imparity 1.00 = Parity*

## **Conclusion**

Gender equality is not only a human right but its essential for a peaceful and sustainable existence of a country. Gender gap in India is increasing heavily. In 2016 India's position in GGG report was 87 and was 108 for 2017 and 2018. In 2020 India's position was 112. We have a number of constitutional provisions and legislative provisions aimed at gender equality. "Beti BachaoBeti Padhao", Skill Power Centres, Micro Credit Entrepreneurship Programs, MGNREGA, etc were implemented with the view of empowering women. Perhaps it can be said that masculinity that fears empowered women keeps them away from political participation and representation. Even when India

has attained gender parity in primary and upper primary education and has been moving towards gender equality in literacy, female labour participation rate has been declining along with increasing gender gap in wage rate. The gender gap in representation is clear from the fact that there have been only sixteen chief ministers in independent India to date. Fifty per cent of the waves of reservation for women in panchayat raj institutions like the one brought by Kerala will empower women in other fields as well. This is one of the reasons why Kerala is at the forefront in the Gender Equality Index of Niti Aayog. In fact, gender equality needs to start from our homes and schools. From there, it will

gradually spread to the mainstream of society. In short government should adopt policies to create conditions, which would allow both women and

men to realize their full human potential in order to bring about gender equality in the society.

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