

Moving beyond Education for Women to Employment for Women: The 2030 Agenda to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of Gender Equality

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Abstract

The latest Human Development Index (2018) released by the United Nations Development Programme shows that India climbed one position to 130 out of 189 countries which only indicates a steady development. One of the major barriers to human development is gender inequality which persists at a global level. India's slow progress and recent trends point out towards the fact that there is a huge gap between educational and employment opportunities in case of women. One of the indicators of sustainable development goals is gender equality without which the overall development of society will be incomplete. The paper thus tries to focus on the fact that women, despite representing in higher education in large number, do not have much access to employment opportunities which push them back in economic participation. Even if women have access to some professions, they are restricted to only women oriented professions like nursing and teacher training. The persistent gender inequality in India in terms of education and employment results in overall decrease in human development index at a global level. Despite many attempts by the government in form of policies and regulations, the patriarchal mindset of the society poses a hindrance in transformation of India from being a developing country to a developed country. In light of that, the paper suggests some measures to counteract the prevailing challenges to achieve the gender equality goal of sustainable development till 2030.

Keywords: Education, Employment, Women, Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

South Asia is the southern region of the Asian continent that consists of about 1.891 billion population. Writing about education in South Asian region means writing about one-fourth of the world's population. South Asia comprises seven adjacent countries; Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The region is geographically knit together and is homogenous in terms of socio-cultural, political, historical, economic, and educational factors. While looking at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is one of the most backward regions of the world, both educationally and economically. Most of the countries in the region rank fairly poor in terms of the human development index, a crude summary of statistics compiled by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). It is done to analyze the situation of countries in terms of certain indices at a global level. South Asia is one of the most backward regions of the world in terms of educational development, with the exception of Sri Lanka. All the countries of the region, except Sri Lanka, are classified as medium human development countries, wherein India fall in the middle. Except Nepal and Bhutan, other countries of the region experienced short and long phases of colonial rule and became independent in the middle of the twentieth century. The devastating colonial impact can be noted on the development of education in the region. Coming to India, the long colonial rule uprooted its basic essence of indigenous knowledge and transformed it into a society which is confused and neither Indian nor

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western. The South Asian subcontinent poses the most serious challenges in education as nearly half the adult illiterates of the world live in the subcontinent. Recently, a remarkable agenda having specific goals to be achieved universally, has been developed to look up to certain parameters while moving towards a sustainable society. All the goals come under the umbrella of what is called “sustainable development goals”. Some of the goals to be mentioned here include; no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, reduced inequalities etc. The fifth crucial goal of sustainable development is gender equality without which it will be difficult to achieve all other goals. One of the forms of inequality is the gender inequality spreading pervasively all over the world which does not spare even developed countries. India poses an example of such inequality which comes in varied forms.

When one talks about Human development, it is about human freedoms and building human capabilities for everyone. One of the most effective measurement tools for analyzing the human development is the Human Development Index (HDI). Measuring national development only by income per capita will provide only incomplete picture, thereby requiring other factors such as health, education, gender equality and employment achievements also to be analyzed. Along with income per capita as one of the indicator of development progress, some additional indices have also been developed over the years to capture other dimensions of human development. This has been done to identify groups falling behind in human progress and to monitor the distribution of human development. Some of the indices launched by UNDP to monitor gender empowerment across multiple human development dimensions include, Gender Inequality Index (GII) and Gender Development Index (GDI). The need to launch these indices lies in the fact that gender inequality has taken many forms and has become more pervasive than ever before, despite awareness programmes formulated by the government and policy makers. The paper specifically focus on the progress of India in terms of gender equality while looking at the educational and employment opportunities for women. The gaps that exist in educational and employment achievements in case of women affects the economic status of the country and thus its status at a global level too. This paper thus attempts to look at the various reasons which cause hindrance in women’s employment opportunities. The paper also tries to argue

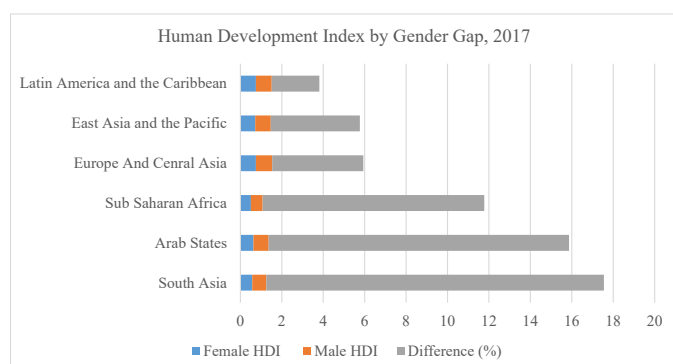
that despite many attempts at a global level and national level, India has not been able to move towards becoming a developed country from being a developing country because of its patriarchal mindset. In light of that the paper suggests some measures in looking forward to improve the present situation of women in economic participation.

India at a Global Scenario: Human Development Index 2018

Recently, the United Nation Development Programme 2018 presented Human Development Index values for 189 countries and territories with the most recent data for 2017. Of these countries, 59 were in the very high human development group, 53 in the high, 39 in the medium and only 38 in the low. The statistics point out that although HDI values have been rising across all regions and human development groups, the rates vary significantly. South Asia was the fastest growing region over 1990-2017, at 45.3%, followed by East Asia and the Pacific at 41.8% and Sub-Saharan Africa at 34.9%. But it is also to be noted that despite such a progress the continent is still placed at a lower position globally.

Gender inequality is one of the barriers to sustainable development that is more pronounced in south Asian countries especially India. Along with many facets, educational and employment opportunities is also one of the prominent area wherein gender inequality operates. There are number of loopholes and gaps which exists with respect to education and employment opportunities provided to women in India. One of the crucial role that gender equality plays, is in improvement of status and development of any nation at a global level. India, being a developing country need to come out of the patriarchal mindset which does not allow its women to come out of their niche. It must be noted that women form half of the population of the country without which development of India can never be achieved, leading to it slow progress towards becoming a developed nation. The disadvantages faced by women and girls are a major source of inequality and one of the greatest barriers to human development progress. Worldwide, the average HDI value for women (0.705) is 5.9% lower than that for men (0.749) (UNDP, 2018, Table 4, p. 37). Much of the gap is due to women’s lower income and educational attainment in many countries. The gender gap is widest in low human development countries. Among developing regions the

gender gap is narrowest in Latin America and the Caribbean (2.3%) and widest in South Asia (16.3%) and the Arab States (14.5%) (UNDP, 2018, p. 7).



Source: UNDP (2018, p. 7)

Fig. 1: Human Development Index by Gender Gap in Developing Regions, 2017

The gap in female and male Human Development index in South Asian countries is much wider as compared to other continents. To have a clear picture as to what can be the root causes, let us look at the Human Development index of South Asian countries in terms of inequality in education.

Table 1: Human Development Index Rank, Value and Inequality in Education of South Asian Countries

South Asian Countries	HDI Rank	HDI Value	Inequality in Education (%)
Sri Lanka	76	0.770	12.8
Maldives	102	0.717	40.0
India	129	0.640	38.7
Bhutan	135	0.612	41.7
Bangladesh	138	0.608	37.3
Myanmar	147	0.578	26.9
Nepal	148	0.574	40.9
Pakistan	149	0.562	46.2

Source: UNDP (2018)

The data indicates that except Sri Lanka, gender gaps in education in all the countries are more or less similar. Another two indices that capture the disparities between men and women are Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Inequality Index (GII). GDI reports female and male achievements in the basic dimensions of human development whereas GII captures the inequalities

women face in reproductive health, education, political representation and the labour market. The higher the GII value, the greater the gender inequality, which occurs in all countries. The global GII value in 2017 was 0.441 (UNDP, Table 5, p. 41).

Table 2: Gender Development Index (GDI) in South Asian Countries

Countries	GDI Group	Estimated Gross National Income Per Capita (\$)		Labour Force Participation Rates in South Asian Countries	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
Sri Lanka	3	6,462	16,581	35.1	74.1
Maldives	4	7,064	18,501	42.9	82.1
India	5	2,722	9,729	27.2	78.8
Bhutan	5	6,002	9,889	58	74.3
Myanmar	2	3,860	7,355	51.3	79.9
Nepal	4	2,219	2,738	82.7	85.9
Pakistan	5	1,642	8,786	24.9	82.7

Source: UNDP (2018, Table 4 and Table 5)

GDI Group means countries are divided into five groups by absolute deviation from gender parity displaying the position of countries. Group 1 comprises of countries having high equality in HDI achievements among women and men. The table indicates that India belongs to group 5 displaying that the level of gender inequality persist at an alarming stage due to which affects its women's participation in economic aspects. Labour force participation rates and estimated gross national income per capita both are low in case of women pointing towards women's deplorable situation in India. Among women, unemployment rates are higher and labour force participation rates lower. Yet women provide most unpaid care work in the home thereby limiting their choices in paid work. Lack of women's empowerment is a critical aspect of gender inequality which can be possible only through their representation in nation's economy.

Gender Dimensions of Educational and Employment Opportunities for Women in India: Moving beyond Education to Employment

Education is essential for attaining knowledge and skills and a means of getting employment to earn and feel

empowered. Moving ahead from being educated to being employed is a step towards the empowerment. Being employed gives an edge over those who are not employed as it enables a person to become independent and decision maker. But in case of women, the recent data shows that even education does not guarantee employment for women. National Family Health Survey (NFHS), one of the sources providing the data on employment and unemployment also noted in 2005-06 that women are much less likely than men to be employed. It raises a question as to what happens in women's life that restricts their entry into the field of employment. What loopholes does education of girls have which are not enabling them to have autonomy and empowerment and why it has been limited as just a means to reinforce traditional thinking confining them within the interests of family, child care, health and education? Why education has failed in case of girls and women that they find it difficult to come out of the vicious circle of traditional roles and duties?

There are educated women who can participate and contribute to the Indian economy but find it difficult to come out of their niche and transform their education into productive skills through better employment opportunities. The factors responsible for such condition must be attended to bridge this gap for better utilization of the skills of women citizen which is otherwise going waste. As regards India's employment sector, the recent shifts accounts for the withdrawal of women from the labour force on a large scale basis. "Across nearly all industries, the impact of technological and other changes is shortening the shelf-life of employees' existing skill sets" (World Economic Forum, 2016, p. 3). The slowdown of India's employment structure affects its women citizen the most leaving them behind as only a marginal percentage in the working population. Thomas (2012) noted that the new manufacturing employment created during the first half of the 2000s, have 3.7 million women out of 9.6 million employees. But during the second half of the 2000s, 3.1 million out of the 3.7 million workers who lost jobs in manufacturing in India were females. "However, it is striking that the proportion of females attending to domestic duties is relatively high in urban areas and among the better educated – the very segments of the female population that are likely to face less social constraints on labour participation" (Thomas, 2012, p. 47). A report 'Towards Equality' by the Committee on the

Status of Women in India (Government of India, 1974) also mentioned that education does not necessarily lead women to employment. Mazumdar and Neetha (2011) highlighted that in most of the major industries, women's share of employment has fallen in 2009-10 in comparison with 2004-05. It was found that, women were engaged more in traditional, domestic, and low skilled jobs in the employment sector.

As mentioned by Ahuja and Filmer (1985), south Asia being the least educated region will gradually augment its human capital by the year 2020 as per the UNESCO's projections of enrollment and estimates. Along with that it also highlighted that gender gap in education will continue to become more worse leading to still lower female enrolment levels than males. A report by Government of India (2017, p. 22) shows that girls constitute 46.8% of the total enrollment in higher education level. Though the number of enrollment is more or less equal in terms of enrollment but it is also to be noted that share of females in institutes national importance is very low. Female enrollment in the courses such as nursing and teacher training is higher (86.4% and 62% respectively) as compared to polytechnic courses specially meant for engineering courses (17.4%). When it comes to representation of women in faculty positions at higher level, it is worth to be noted that higher the position, lower the representation of women. According to Klasen and Lamanna (2009) a subject that has not been investigated in great detail is the impact of gender inequality in employment and pay on economic growth. A number of theoretical and empirical studies finding that gender inequality in education and employment reduces economic growth. Sen (1987) highlighted a continuous reluctance in considering the position of women in economic participation. The author highlighted the importance of gender as a crucial parameter in social and economic analysis. The systematically inferior position of women inside and outside the house points to the importance of treating gender as a means and force of its own in development analysis "The divisional arrangements that, on the one hand, may help in the economic survival and in the overall opulence of families and societies, may also impose, through the same process, a typically unequal division of job-opportunities and work-freedoms" (Sen, 1987, p. 15). The distributions of food, health care, education, employment are of obvious importance in determining each person's actual

command over necessities which is often a source of inequality. There are some deep-seated notions of “legitimacy” that operate in the distribution within the family supplementing the operations of entitlement relations at the levels of households, occupation groups and classes. Sen (2001) mentioned varied forms of gender inequality in which professional inequality is one of them. “In employment as well as work and promotion, women face greater handicaps than men” (p. 467). Chaudhry and Rahman (2009) has pointed out that gender inequality in educational opportunities have significant effect on poverty standards in Pakistan, which is also a patriarchal country like India. The author highlighted that the difference in roles and responsibilities among women and men stems from our families, societies and culture. The concept of gender includes our expectations about the characteristics, attitudes and behaviors of women and men, and is vital in facilitating gender analysis. The different roles, rights and resources that both the genders have in society are important determinants of the nature and scope of their inequality and poverty. Inequality in access to resources between women and men is most common in poor and developing countries. Gender inequality refers to inequality in conditions among women and men for realizing their full human rights. The status of women in India is somehow different from that of western countries. Home has been defined as a women legitimate ideological and physical space where she performs her procreative role as a mother and wife while man dominates the world outside the home and performs his productive role as a breadwinner. Gender-based segregation of the occupations can be seen as a result of discriminatory practices against women which come through prejudices, social beliefs, and stereotypes about women’s inability to perform certain tasks. “Certain industries declare them (women) to be unsuitable for technical as well as manual jobs, others declare them to be unsuitable for managerial and administrative jobs as well as unskilled work, yet another group finds them unsuitable for field duties” (Government of India, 1974, p. 176). Gender differences in the occupation lead to different economic outcomes for the sexes in terms of earnings, hours of work, and other standards. Females’ less representation in the economic outcomes lead to weakening of their actual potential. Ultimately their participation is assumed to be negligible in the economy. The resulting inequalities tend to restrict women’s access to resources, control over decision-making and participation in public life.

Challenges for Women in Employment Market

The challenges in women’s life come at various moments, continues throughout her life and comes in varied forms. Be it home or life outside home, she has to face all the odds keeping in mind the interests of society. It points out to the inverse correlation between educational gender gap and participation in employment sector. Education, expected as a process of building confidence and decision-making power in individual, has not been able to make any change in the lives of girls. Education is not making any difference to their participation in employment sector. The reason lies in the fact that the pattern of division of work among men and women still persists as society accepts patriarchal culture.

In light of above discussion, it becomes necessary to ponder upon the various reasons due to which women are representing less in the economy. First, the patriarchal norms are responsible for hindering the opportunities for women and their limited access to employment market. “Most existing education systems at all levels provide and continue a number of 20th century practices that are hindering progress on today’s talent and labour market issues” (World Economic Forum, 2016, p. 8). The gendered patterns of parental investment becomes clearly visible when choose courses having lower labour demand for girls and thus investing less as compared to technical and professional courses which are considered more suitable for boys. Here the biological makeup of women based on women’s reproduction capacity is not considered compatible with technical and professional education. The second reason is the social context that shapes women’s job preferences playing a significant role in reducing women’s labour participation in India. These include restrictions imposed on women’s movements outside the household and also discouragement by the husband and in-laws” (Thomas, 2012, p. 47). Maintaining women’s sexual purity is one of the biggest factors for not allowing women to work outside. Also, social status and proximity to the home are the most important factors while making preferences, especially for women belonging to upper caste and class who engage themselves in status production activity like education of children, health care of family, engaging in rites and rituals etc. Abraham (2013) highlighted the fact that with high household income and

economic development, cultural preferences take priority over education thus limiting women to domestic area and not feeling the need to work outside. Kabeer (2003) highlighted that value ascribed to education and the way it is utilized may be influenced by the wider context in which it is provided. Societies wherein extreme forms of gender inequality prevails, women's access to education is likely to be curtailed by various forms of restrictions on their mobility and by their limited role in the wider economy. The shift in location of work place away from home leaves less time for family and related matters which pushes women to withdraw from work as it affects their family. Thirdly, the absence of suitable employment opportunities restricts female LPR the most. Kodoth and Eapen (2005) noted that nearly three-fourths of the unemployed women reported that they had not been able to find jobs of their preference. As a result they keep aspiring for white-collar jobs by continuing in the education stream longer due to which they show up in the category of unemployed. The wide gap between their educational qualification and the type of jobs made available to them discourage women to step ahead in the employment sector. Fourth are the various forms of discrimination at the workplace that tend to reduce female LPR. In India as elsewhere, women face discrimination particularly in terms of wages. Dube (2001) points out that only less paid jobs are offered to girls as compared to boys to maintain the hierarchy of our social system. Along with that even in same profile jobs women who are equally efficient are paid less than men. One of the reasons among many is the assumption that women are less efficient than men, due to which their representation in employment sector is less. Giving excuse of women's less efficiency, it becomes easy for recruiters to differentiate between their earnings as compared to men which in turn seen as low returns of education in case of girls. Fifth is the dual burden of family and work due to which women suffer from lot of health issues and find it difficult to handle both family and work simultaneously. "Whatever may be the level of education, the share of household activities (for women) seems to have increased from 1983 to 2009-10" (Abraham, 2013, p. 106). In the end it can be seen that the patriarchal system that does not allow men to contribute in household chores leaving the entire burden on women, no matter she is working or a homemaker.

Along with the above, other forms of discrimination include occupational segregation wherein women are

engaged more in low skilled jobs which are not given much preference in the employment market. Also, sexual harassment cases deter women to step outside their homes for work. A major problem faced by working women as noted by Shiva (2013) is that they are bound to leave their child in daycare or with maid which is not possible for every woman due to financial constraints. This creates more tension in women and less concentration on their work. All these factors do not function independently rather they are very much interdependent. After marriage, the most common barriers that comes her way are pregnancy, childbirth and child care which are seen as the ultimate responsibility of women. These factors affect women's work experience along with the income and opportunities. This in turn leads to a notion that girls' education can hardly make any impact on their future aspects. It is like a cycle of processes which keeps on repeating. Firstly, girls are not given appropriate education resulting in few employment options. Even after getting education girls are expected to put more concern over getting ready for marriage. Out of the few options available, girls get less opportunity due to fulfilling other duties like playing traditional roles of being a mother, daughter and wife which are very demanding.

How can this be Reversed?: The 2030 Agenda to Attain Sustainable Development Goal of Gender Equality

Sen (2001) points out to the fact that women's gainful employment, especially in more rewarding occupations does play a role in improving the life prospects of women and girls. An enhancement of women's active agency can contribute substantially to the lives of women and men both along with children in terms of reduction of child neglect, mortality rates, decrease fertility and overcrowding along with broadening of social concern and care. The discussion can be supplemented by considering the functioning of women in other areas such as economic and politics. "The result of women's participation in economic life is not merely to generate income for women but also to provide many other social benefits that derive from the enhanced status and independence" (Sen, 2001, p. 474). Inquiring into the economic participation or availability of employment opportunities have to be found in broad cultural and social issues. The cultivation of women's empowerment and agency through women's

education and gainful employment can prove to be effective only when the anti-female bias behaviour, reflecting the hold of traditional masculinist values, will stop being inherited from generations to generations. More than freedom of action, it is the freedom of thought that is required for freedom to question and scrutinize inherited beliefs and traditional priorities. The problems plaguing the educational and employment system of India and other South Asian countries are multidimensional like patriarchal mindset, population explosion, lack of resources, non-participation of the private sector, scarcity of qualified man power, inconsistency in the policies of various regimes, political instability, inefficient educational management system, wastage of resources, and poor implementation of policies and programme.

Looking at certain challenges that women face while entering into employment sector, certain measures can prove to be helpful in assuring their participation in economic development of the country. These measures include; gender mainstreaming, reservation for women candidates in political, educational and other decision making institutes, crèches and day care facilities, maternity leaves, fill the gaps in career through training and other sources, equal salary, GCASH at work place (gender sensitization committee against sexual harassment). As Kumar and Gupta (2008) highlights, it demands overcoming deep mental blocks in the adult minds about girls' efficiency and capacity to participate in the economic workforce as decision makers. According to Medel-Anonuevo (1995), empowerment can have four components: cognitive, psychological, economic and political, the attainment of which requires collective awareness along with the individual awareness. Therefore, it becomes necessary for women to realize their potential and understand the various ways of their subordination so that they can take necessary steps to counteract these constraining factors which are so imbedded in our society.

Conclusion

Disparities between women and men in realizing their full potential stand as a great barrier to human development progress, holding back half the world's population. Women have a lower HDI value than men across regions and face particular barriers to empowerment all through life. For human development to become truly sustainable, the world needs to adopt sustainable approach towards life

and fellow beings. With the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, the sustainable development goals promises to leave no one behind, particularly in a world that is increasingly unequal, unstable and unsustainable. India's social problems will magnify if the country does not take along its women force alongside providing more quality jobs, increase social mobility, and expand and improve its overburdened education system. One way of thinking about empowerment can be in terms of power which implies the ability to make choice. In words of Kabeer (2003), education may increase women's effectiveness in the traditional roles and moreover it may reinforce restrictive interpretations of these roles. Due to such reasons it is evitable to move beyond the slogan of 'education for women' to 'employment for women'. Achievements in human development should be expressed not only in terms of quantity, such as life expectancy or years of schooling, but also in terms of quality. From a human development viewpoint, true progress can be achieved only by ensuring quality in education, health and employment.

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