



Research Paper

## Giving Equal Platform to Women: The Iceland

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### Abstract

Road to development cannot be travelled without ensuring equality in labor market and equal pay for work. The attacking movement on gender inequality was initiated by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. He always stressed on somehow achieving women empowerment in Indian society. According to him, both sexes should be treated equal in front of the society irrespective of cast, creed, color and religion etc. The robust legislations and policies of women empowerment were incorporated by dr. Ambedkar in Indian constitution. The main aim of the paper is to elaborate the thoughts and views of B R Ambedkar in regard to gender inequality and his contribution towards achieving women empowerment.

**Keywords:** Gender Gap, Inequality, Women Empowerment, DR. Ambedkar

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### I. Introduction

Withstand to the highly invested policy framework of developed countries to decline the magnitude of inequality among sexes, the gap is still blown with their own strong wings. However, it is evenly large in third world countries, likewise developed nations also engulf with this culprit. Over the last thirty years, the global political agenda is barking on gender equality, which is far away dream for the nations. Gender equality is an important human right with necessary condition of economic development and decline in poverty (UNFPA). Moreover, women empowerment and gender equality are two facets of same coin, which is covered under Millennium Development Goals (MDG 3). Despite stringent policy framework, women continuously lagging behind in agriculture sector, top-notch leadership positions in private and government bodies. (United Nations). As per the facts of Millennium Development Goals (2015), the proportion of women participation in paid employment opportunities is crawling by six percent over the twenty-five years, which presents improvement in gender equality across the world is at slow pace. Despite this, there are various obstacles, faced by women, to participate in political leadership and decision-making. According to UN General Assembly (2012), woman is being faced as marginalized because of biased political laws, low level of education level, lack of health care services and gender stereotypes in society. There are large number of international conventions regarding women equality, which states that women's economic participation can only pave the way of gender equality. (UN Women) There is one country on a planet that does not achieve only rapid economic growth, but also ensure gender equality to their female citizens particularly- Iceland. (Global Gender Gap Report, 2018,2020). To promote gender equality, Iceland's national machinery brings oil from four buckets- family leave, children assistance, taxation system and equality & work. According to the latest Global Gender Gap report 2021, it has been estimated that world will take 135.6 years to close the gender gap. Moreover, the report highlights that females have 26% proportion over the 35500 parliamentary seats and 22% over the 3400 ministerial positions in 156 countries. In 81 countries, women has never been occupied the position of head of state. The World Economic Forum anticipates the year to close the gap within sub index – Politics (145.5 years), educational attainment and Health & Survival (14.2 years), Economic Participation and Opportunity (267.7 years).

### Composition of Global Gender Gap Index : A Present scenario

World Economic Forum firstly introduced the methodology of calculating the gender gap index in 2006. From last fifteen years, the methodology remain unchanged until 2021. The Global Gender Gap Index

stands on four main pillars, which examines the gap between male and female in their own categories. The first pillar is defined as Economic Participation and Opportunity that measures the gap between males and females in labor force participation, remuneration and participation in top-notch positions such as professional and technical workers, managers and legislators. Besides this, to ensure gender equality on every platform, education is key part of it. This second sub index revolves around four basic statistics- literacy rate, enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education. The lifelong development and deployment of human capital is a key element of economic growth. The third pillar health and survival covers two categories that are life expectancy and sex ratio at birth , which measures the difference between male’s and female’s health. Accessibility to quality healthcare is a primary factor to enhance the productivity. The top grade positions of making political decisions to parliamentary positions is defined under the fourth gauge of Global Gender Gap Index- political empowerment. It captures the gap between the participation of women and men at various government positions.

It can be seen from table 1 that how the weights of listed indicators under Global Gender Gap Index are classified. Inequality in economic activities mainly basis on remuneration that provided to workers. Therefore, wage equality is top priority to realize equal economic participation and opportunity among sexes and it has accumulated maximum weight 0.310. the another factor of this index- education attainment, gives maximum weight to primary education rather than tertiary education because school enrolment is a critical stage of child’s development and starts learning various social, cognitive, emotional and intellectual skills. The third pillar of the gender equality wall is highly inclined towards sex ratio at birth (70% weight) instead of healthy life expectancy. One reason is life starts from mother’s womb and if fetus is harmed inside, there is no role of healthy life expectancy. Political women empowerment at highly paid positions is still lagging in developed and developing countries. Among three indicators, the maximum weight goes to years with female head state (last 50).

**Table1: Calculation of Weight of Gender Equality Indicators**

Main Indicators	Sub Indicators	Weight
Economic Participation and Opportunity	Labour Force Participation Rate (%)	0.199
	Wage equality for similar work (1-7 scale)	0.310
	Estimated earned income (PPP,\$)	0.221
	Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers (%)	0.149
	Professional and Technical Workers (%)	0.121
	Literacy rate (%)	0.191
Educational Attainment	Enrolment in primary education (%)	0.459
	Enrolment in secondary education (%)	0.230
	Enrolment in tertiary education (%)	0.121
Health and Survival	Sex ratio at birth (%)	0.693
	Healthy Life Expectancy (years)	0.307
Political Empowerment	Women in Parliament (%)	0.310
	Women in ministerial positions (%)	0.247
	Years with female head of state (last 50), share of tenure years	0.443

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2021

### **India Benchmark**

Being a small island, Iceland is persistently moving on the path of gender equality, ranks top in 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. This performance is not short-term achievement, as it has been soiled under commonwealth period. Icelandic Females with notion of ‘Strong Women’ have enjoyed their economic, social and religious liberty with dignity, owing to feminist movements, strong legislation, gender budgeting and collective work of women human rights defenders (WEF, 2021). Moreover, the prime focus area of Iceland nation is always gender equality issues, because it is core of breakdown of various virtuous and vicious cycle of underdevelopment and poverty. According to the Iceland’s report on Beijing +25, Iceland continues to work to secure de jure and de facto gender equality. As per the latest estimates of Global Gender Gap report 2021, Iceland ranks first in closing the gender gap by 89.2%. The small island – Iceland has well performed in all four indicators. In case of economic participation and opportunity, the nation achieves fourth position globally and closed 84.6% gap. It has been estimated by ILO (International Labor Organization) that women are more participated in labor work force, technical and professional jobs due to the policy of childcare assistance in Iceland. Moreover, female is ruling the Iceland economy as head of the state from last 50 years and forty percent seats of ministers and parliament body is under the hold of women. Thus, political empowerment gap is closed by seventy six percent in Iceland. The remarkable achievement of Iceland is closing the gender gap in health & survival (96.4%) and

educational attainment (99.9%). In Iceland, out of 100, ten women choose technical subjects in graduation – science, mathematics, engineering and information technology (GGG report, 2021)

**Table 2: Iceland Score Card of Gender Equality Indicators (2021)**

Indicators	Rank	Score	Average
Economic Participation and Opportunity	2	0.839	0.582
Labour Force Participation Rate (%)	17	0.945	0.661
Wage equality for similar work (1-7 scale)	1	0.846	0.613
Estimated earned income (PPP,\$)	26	0.734	0.499
Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers (%)	21	0.708	0.356
Professional and Technical Workers (%)	1	1.000	0.756
Educational Attainment	38	0.999	0.954
Literacy rate (%)	1	1.000	0.899
Enrolment in primary education (%)	82	0.998	0.757
Enrolment in secondary education (%)	1	1.000	0.954
Enrolment in tertiary education (%)	1	1.000	0.931
Health and Survival	123	0.988	0.958
Sex ratio at birth (%)	1	0.944	0.925
Healthy Life Expectancy (years)	133	1.021	1.034
<b>Political Empowerment</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.701</b>	<b>0.239</b>
Women in Parliament (%)	23	0.616	0.298
Women in ministerial positions (%)	17	0.667	0.255
Years with female head of state (last 50), share of tenure years	2	0.779	0.190

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2021

### **Equality in wages and labor market:**

Road to development cannot be travelled without ensuring equality in labor market and equal pay for work. The attacking movement on gender inequality by Icelanders is that they supports a high degree of women participation in the labor market. According to the database of ILO (2020), 75% women are engaged in labor force, out of which maximum share (90.6%) are employed in service sector. The female share in managers, professionals and technician jobs are 56.8% in 2020. Meanwhile, the Iceland labor market ensures safe working conditions, protective environment to women with higher gender segregation. Withstand to this, the Iceland had succeed in reducing the wage hour gap between both sexes over the period of ten years. One major drawback of Iceland labor market is that more women (33%) are employed as part time as compared to men (13.5%), estimated in 2018 by Beijing +25 Task Force. Equality in wages is also intrinsic part of gender parity. For this purpose, in 2012 the law of Icelandic Equal Pay Standard was passed for covering gender pay gap in entire labor market (Wagner, 2020). As per the report of Iceland (2019), the adjusted gender pay gap was down by two percent from 2008(6.6%) to 2016(4.5%). According to the report of ‘The position of women and men in the Icelandic labor market’ there is high degree of equality exist in the labor market and women’s participation is increasing in management position (Thorgeirsdottir, 2019).

### **Work Family Settlement**

The settlement of caregiving and breadwinning for woman is complex task without participation of male counterpart. Caregiving and motherhood penalty limits the productivity of female and decline the chances of employment opportunities. The Gender Equality Act of Iceland aims to increase flexibility in the work structure and work hours. Moreover, the Maternity/Paternity and Parental leave Act (2000) of Iceland is contributing gender parity in the economy. After 2000, the leave duration was increases up to nine months, which was further bifurcated into three months in maternity, paternity and parental leave system. The major objective of the leave system is to enable both parents concentrate on their professions and family. In the period of 2000-2005, the average length of maternity leave was shortened by five days (186 to 181 days) and paternity leave was increased from 14 days to 96 days after the implementation of act (Anarson&Mitra, 2008). The ninety

percent of fathers in Iceland use paternity leave and it has positive effect on settlement of domestic and professional obligations (Iceland's Report on Beijing +25).

### **Women Participation in Management**

Article 15 of Gender Equality act ensures the equal participation of male and female, not lower than 40% in national and local government bodies. To change the gender composition in management, Gender Quota system was passed due to which the percentage of women in executive position increased from 13.3% to 22.8% in 2019. According to the statistics Iceland (2020), the share of women in boards of director in enterprise with 50 or more persons has increased from 9.5% in 1999 to 34.7% in 2019. Moreover, 26.5% women has chaired the seat of Board of Directors in Icelandic enterprises in 2019 and 23% are enjoyed the managerial status of enterprises.

### **Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls**

To pay the equal status to women and girls, the Iceland government adopted General Penal Code against domestic violence with robust policies and preventive actions. With this, the amendment was made in 2007 for adopting sexual violence and in 2013, the inter-ministerial committee of government find ways and procedures for sexual violence against children. At this time, a draft was passed in regarding to human trafficking in Iceland. After passing such legislations, violence against women and girls is not ended up.

### **Iceland Historical Policy Responses**

As per the World Economic Forum data, Iceland is the frontrunner in gender equality for last twelve years. From the twentieth century, Icelanders are persistently move forward to ensure equality among men and women, by passing incredible and unique laws in the country. These legal laws are success story of ensuring equal platform to women on this planet, which brings economic progress vis -a -vis social changes in the country.

During the mid ninetieth century, women in Iceland had gained inheritance right equal to men, which starts the journey of gender equality in this small world. Prior to that, daughters had the right to one-third of the property. In 1882, a group of women such as unmarried, and widows got right to vote and in 1887, the first woman gave public speech on women's right. With the passage of time, right to education was given to the females and first female education college was founded at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the start of twentieth century, females procured the right to hold local office and in 1909, a right to vote was given to all women that enhance the power of equality. In addition to this, females secured the right to education, public grants and holding public office in 1911. With these legal developments in Iceland, women's human rights started to take shape in the society. Asides this in Parliamentarian set up, women had just 1% seats in council member (1958) but in 1970, first woman was appointed as cabinet minister. In order to create awareness about gender gap in Iceland, twenty five thousand women went for strike in 1975 and demanded for women's contribution to the economy. Because of this, a law on three months maternal leave, abortion, reproductive and maternal health was passed. Gender equality was realized in real terms, when fourth president of Iceland was elected female in 1980, which increase the proportion of women seats in council member. Thus, the pace of gender equality shoot up with the advancements of various laws in the state. Umpteen developments regarding equality issues was put forward in late 2000's. Exclusive paternity leave scheme is the outcome of gender equality in Iceland that peculiar in this world. The paternal leave states that father and mother has same obligation toward their children so it cannot be transferred to mother.

## **II. Conclusion**

Although, the Iceland is successful for empowering the women through fundamental gender parity policies, programmes, gender quota & budgeting and various other legislations but gender inequality is still persisted. It is win- win situation that Iceland- a small island is doing wonderful piece of work in terms of reducing gender gap, which highly developed large nation fails to achieve it. After deep review of World Economic Forum Report on Global Gender Gap, various ways are come out as an example for middle-income countries and low-income countries. For Instance, Iceland has best maternity/ paternity and parental leave system in the world, which break down the clashes between family and work. Moreover, gender quota system in management and top business position enhance the beauty of Icelandic policies. It is undoubtedly known to every nation that women is the most valuable asset of economic development, whom starts the life cycle of human being from her womb.

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