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A web based study on women in South Asia and the challenges

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Abstract---This research paper explores the current condition of women in South Asia. It discusses the challenges of south Asian women in their quest for development through equal opportunities. It talks about problems and solution for the up-liftment of women in South Asia. This research paper explores the various challenges faced by women in the South Asian countries. This paper explores the potential remedies for these challenges so that the world can be a better place for women.

Keywords---women, South Asia, gender equality, equality, opportunities.

Introduction

Worldwide women's share is 49% in population. There is a lot of scope for women to participate in the development of the countries in which they live. Their contribution at home is priceless but at the same time, they need to take part in the other areas like employment, entrepreneurship, business leadership, political authority... etc.

Professional front

While many High Income group countries are racing towards the equal opportunities for women, certain regions are struggling to move forward in this area. South Asia has a large number of women which is more than 30% of world's women population Asian Countries need to work much harder in empowering their women as the opportunities for men are a big challenge. Unemployment, Under employment, lack of Quality education, poor accessibility to Higher education are some of the major hurdles leaving alone the cultural, social and religious aspects which often bar the development of women. "Worldwide, as many as 650 million women alive today married before they turned 18" (<https://www.worldvision.org/>)

The threat of automation and the need to reskill woman employees before technology takes away their jobs and cause a lot of unemployment of woman employees is being discussed widely in developed and High income countries while a majority of the low income countries are struggling to improve their GDP by increasing the participation of their women in the economic activity.

Human Development Index

Human Development Indices of Asian countries are far behind when compared to north-Asian countries. According to United Nations' data, 2 In the gender inequality index, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bhutan are ranked below 100, the remaining Asian countries are lagging behind and doing very poor around the ranks of 122, 129, 136 and 143. Gender inequality is without a doubt a major hurdle to human development in the world.

S. No	Name of the Country	Human Development Index	Gender Inequality Index
1	Afghanistan	170	143
2	India	129	122
3	Bhutan	134	99
4	Bangladesh	135	129
5	Pakistan	152	136
6	Srilanka	71	86
7	Nepal	147	115
8	Maldives	104	81

Access to public places

Social Participation of Women in the workforce need drastic improvement in India and the neighbouring countries. According to a global study done by the 'Council on Foreign Relations' on Women's "Access of Institutions and use of Property" It has been estimated that India stands in the rank 102 out of the 189 countries. This research is titled " Women's Workplace Equality Index" 1 The Neighbouring countries are ranked as below

	Country	Rank	South Asian Order
1	India	102	2
2	Nepal	131	5
3	Srilanka	110	4
4	Bangladesh	149	6
5	Pakistan	164	7
6	Bhutan	104	3
7	Maldives	92	1
8	Afghanistan	168	8

Few in the workforce

While the women in work force is also almost at similar numbers. The Neighbouring countries are ranked as below. With a score of 37.5 out of hundred,

India stands just about 15 places above the least scoring countries (out of 189). Just 15 places above the last one in the list, the rank is supposed to be 174 among a list of 189 countries.

		Position	Score out of 100
1	India	174	37.5
2	Nepal	182	30.2
3	Srilanka	176	35.7
4	Bangladesh	184	26.7
5	Pakistan	185	24.1
6	Bhutan	81	61.9
7	Maldives	84	61.1
8	Afghanistan	168	33.5

Leveling the playing field

Gender inequality is the major disruption for the career of women. All the women who are working currently are doing good in spite of the hurdles like child bearing, child care and family responsibilities. The field is not leveled for the play as the women are expected to take on dual responsibilities of home and work both at the same time. Even among the educated and well to do students, women are behind men in the competition. For example among the students registering in US universities for Higher education, men are dominant in number. (12% more) “Forty-four per cent (552,188) of F-1 and M-1 international students in calendar year 2020 were female, while 56 per cent (698,964) were male. Among Indian students, 35 per cent were females and 65 per cent are males. For China the figures are 47 per cent are females and 53 per cent are males.”³

Poor Graduation rate of women

Graduate Enrollment ratio in South Asian countries is low compared to other countries. Among the enrolled graduates women candidates are comparatively much lower compared to the male candidates being enrolled. and The rate of graduation of woman needs to improve and it takes lot of new jobs to be able to employ these woman graduates.

Employment and skill development

Women workforce in south asia is low when compared to other Asian countries. It is much lower when compared to developed countries in the other continents.

Science technology and Engineering

There some recent studies done on gender equation in the International and national academic scenario. Participation of women in the science, technology and Engineering fields is very low in the South-Asian countries. In the field of Business management, the numbers of women are comparatively low.

	STEM	Social Sciences	Business
Male	69%	30%	60%
Female	31%	70%	40%

Participation of women in the technical fields is very low in the south asian countries.

Education as a major challenge

Indian Gross Enrollment ratio is steadily growing in the last 6 years but it is still at the lower levels when compared to the advanced countries. Young people aged 18-23 who are in college are 27% and 73 % of them are outside their colleges. 73% of the population not being able to pursue graduation is certainly alarming and this situation is not good for the GDP of the country as they may not be able to find jobs in which they pay taxes. The chances of them getting pushed towards poverty are high. 40 thousand colleges and 1040 universities are

Management and Leadership

Considering the women leadership in South Asia, Nepal is the only country that has a woman leader at the head (Presidents/Rulers/ Prime ministers). All the other countries are led by men. In an article titled“Fortune India 500: Why are there so few women leaders? 10 written by Arnika Takhur (Jan 5, 2020), it is stated that only 6% of the fortune India 500 companies are led by women leaders. It is 30 companies out of 500 major conglomerates. According to the Forbes India list of top 100 billionaires in India, there are only 4 women leaders of corporate in India and all the others are men.

Taking India as an Example, India being the largest of the south Asian countries, Among the 30 cabinet ministers of the federal government there are 2 women ministers and the numbers could have been more encouraging than this. Among the 30 existing heads of state (Chief Ministers) there is only one woman leader in politics. (Elected by people). And among the 26 High Court Judges there isn't even one woman female judge (Nominated by the President). There are 3 women governors among 26 governors (of state) in India nominated by the President of India. 7. In an article titled“Fortune India 500: Why are there so few women leaders? 10 written by Arnika Takhur (Jan 5, 2020), it is stated that only 6% of the fortune India 500 companies are led by women leaders. It is 30 companies out of 500 major conglomerates.

Culture and tradition as barriers

The world bank has stated the women workforce in south Asian countries is only 23.6%. It was mentioned in the website of the world bank during the week in which the “ Asia Women in Workforce Week” during 8th to 13th of March 2020. The male work force in this region is said to be 80%. 6 The society is mostly male dominated and women are looked at as a property in several places in south Asia.

Social Condition

There is poverty all over the place in countries that are ear marked as low income countries. Poverty is on a rise after the covid-19 pandemic. Livelihoods are at risk due to lock-downs and loss of jobs and shutting down of businesses lead to an economic disaster. Poverty levels have gone up due to the Covid-19. Poverty is a major reason why women are not able to progress in their careers. Most of the child marriages, teen mariages, drop-outs from school school education all these things have got poverty at their roots. Afghan Political Crisis is going add many more numbers to this threatening condition of child marriage and dropping-out from schools and colleges. Girl children are given in marriage to older men who are well to do. This can result in many

Early marriage as a threat

In South Asian Countries one in every three girl children are under the threat of early marriage, either it is a child marriage or a teen marriage. Marriage is supposed to be a happy transition of a person in life but in south asia, marriage is a threat, it curbs the potential of 30 percent of women. Most of these early married girls become mothers early in life and lose many opportunities in life.

Bangladesh, India and Nepal as a prime examples

“In Nepal, 41 percent of women aged 20 to 24 are married before they turn 18” “The gross enrolment ratio (GER) for the age group of 18-23 years in higher education institutes in India is 27.1. The ratio for male population is 26.9 and 27.3 for females”.⁵ Women are slightly ahead of men in higher education in India and this is a welcome change. Child Mariages in bangladesh and India are high in Number and the necessity of curbing this practice is very high. Apart from Bangladesh and India, Nepal is among the highly vulnerable countries when it comes to the protection of human rights for the girl children. according to United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA, an organization by UN). “Nepal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in Asia – for both girls and boys. Although the legal age of unions for both sexes is 20, more than a third of young women aged 20-24 report that they were married by the age of 18, and just over one in ten by 15.” -UNFPA

The Future

“An additional 13 million child marriages are estimated to occur worldwide over the next decade - fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on the socioeconomic conditions ...” ⁹ There is a need for changing the circumstances for women in the south asian countries. There is a need for more education, more skill development and higher participation in the work force. Work gives women control over assets, which is positively correlated with greater decision-making power and freedom of mobility, lower domestic violence, and improved nutritional outcomes for children. ⁴

India and Sri Lanka are able to increase the number of women in Higher education. The number of women in Higher Education (GER, Gross Enrollment

ration) in Srilanka is 10% above the men, (26 in Women and 16 in Men) and in India it is just one percent above men (27.3 in Women and 26.9 in men), Nepal is still working on increasing their GER and there is a lot of scope to improve the number of women in higher education in Nepal.

Conclusion

Each country is working in their own sphere but there are limitations which are making the progression resistant. So there is a need for south asian forums which bring these countries together through diplomatic relations and they all need to help each other for quick progression. Increasing the participation of women is a method of maximizing productivity. It is a sure way to a higher GDP. South Asian countries are struggling due to low GDP and poor per capita income (PCI). GDP of these countries can steadily grow with the participation of women in their economic activity. These countries need to lay roads for development of women to be able to overcome the challenges that these countries are facing. It is time to remove restrictions on women, give them scholarships to study and make arrangements for their increased participation in all walks of life. Especially encouraging them to take part in Business leadership, politics, entrepreneurship, To be able to benefit through higher participation of women .

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