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Dr Madhumita Deb
Assistant Professor, Dept. of
Economics Margherita College,
Assam, India.

Dr. Sanjay Sen
Assistant Professor, Dept. of
History Margherita College,
Assam, India.

Globalisation and its impact on women in India: A review

Dr Madhumita Deb and Dr. Sanjay Sen

Abstract

Globalisation is a process of increasing interdependence, interconnectedness and integration of economies and societies to such an extent that an event in one part of the globe affects people in other parts of world. We have often heard of global culture and integration of the world economy. However, as this process is not consistent throughout the world, it leads to conflict and fragmentation. The roles of women in India have been changing and they are now emerging from the past traditions into a new era of freedom and rights. The basic objective of this paper is to examine the changing role of women due to globalization in Indian society. This concern is not merely academic but is central to the process of emerging development in India. There is a need to evaluate the impact of globalization on women in India and also to know the positive and negative impacts of it on the position of women in India at present.

Keywords: Globalisation, interdependence, integration, global culture etc.

1. Introduction

Globalization is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Globalization means opening up the economy to facilitate its integration with the world economy. In such a situation it becomes easy to sell goods and services world over and also acquire the same from anywhere in the world. The term "Globalization" has been widely used in 1960's in the Western World and in India in 1990. It is a controversial term and has been defined in several different ways. Globalization indicates that the world today is more interconnected than before.

According to Advered S. Herman, "*Globalisation is the expansion across international borders of management and process. At the same time, it is a condition of facilities and economic relation which is constantly expanding and it's simultaneously changing.*"

The Constitution of India guarantees equality of sexes and in fact grants special favours to women. These can be found in three articles (Article 14, Article 15 (3) and Articles 15 (A)(e)) All these are fundamental rights. Therefore, a woman can go to the court if one is subjected to any discrimination. The most important issues stand as those pertaining to marriage, children, abortion, crimes against women, and inheritance. Crimes like rape, kidnapping, eve teasing and indecent exposure can be grouped as crimes against women.

The roles of women in India have been changing and they are now emerging from the past traditions into a new era of freedom and rights. The basic objective of this paper is to examine the changing role of women due to globalization in Indian society. This concern is not merely academic but is central to the process of emerging development in India. There is a need to evaluate the impact of globalization on women in India and also to know the positive and negative impacts of it on the position of women in India at present.

India today, a country where women are becoming more prominent, yet increasing numbers, women are fighting long-standing prejudices. Women still faces enormous pressure to conform to social mores - conforming to traditional roles within families poses as much of a barrier to businesswomen in India as the still-too-thick glass ceiling at companies. Though women have made great strides in the corporate world in the last three decades, women from all income classes are still too often discouraged by family members from having careers that infringe too much on family life.

Dr Madhumita Deb
Assistant Professor, Dept. of
Economics Margherita College,
Assam, India.

2. Impact of Globalisation

Globalisation affects different groups of women in different places in different ways. On the one hand it may create new opportunities for women to be forerunners in economic and social progress. With the advent of global communication networks and cross-cultural exchange there seems to be a change in the status of women albeit not to a very large extent. However, globalisation has indeed promoted ideas and norms of equality for women that have brought about awareness and acted as a catalyst in their struggle for equitable rights and opportunities. On the other hand it may exacerbate gender inequality in a patriarchal society, especially in the developing world. In the economic realm it may lead to further marginalisation of women in the informal labour sector or impoverishment through loss of traditional sources of income.

3. Positive Effects

Globalization has opened up broader communication lines and brought more companies as well as different worldwide organizations into India. This provides opportunities for not only workingmen, but also women, who are becoming a larger part of the workforce. With new jobs for women, there are opportunities for higher pay, which raises self-confidence and brings about independence. This, in turn, can promote equality between the sexes, something that Indian women have been struggling with their entire lives. Globalization has the power to uproot the traditional views towards women so they can take an equal stance in society.

Agriculture has remained the biggest source of income and livelihood for women in rural areas in India. "Agriculture contributes just over 30 per cent of GNP and accounts for 60 per cent of employment. Nearly 63 per cent of all economically active men are engaged in agriculture, compared to 78 per cent of women. In the three rice-growing states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, women provide more than 2/3 of the inputs including transplanting, weeding, manuring and fertilizing, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, drying, stacking and carrying produce. In the tribal economy of Orissa, women spent 105.4 hours per year on shifting cultivation compared with 50.11 by the men. In the Himalayas, a research study found that where a pair of bullocks works 1,064 hours and a man for 1,212 hours a year, a woman works 3,485 hours a year on a one-hectare farm. A woman on an average works for 640 hours for agricultural operations like weeding, 384 hours for irrigation, 650 hours for transporting manure, 557 hours for sowing, 984 hours for threshing and harvesting."

Women's double burden - working long hours in the field as well as attending to household chores like cooking and collecting water and fuel for the day - is often taken for granted. The technology used in agriculture is making women to cope with the technology.

The emergence of a global market, with its associated policies of privatization, "stabilization", and liberalization, has led to the setting up of smaller new industries with highly flexible organization and simple infrastructure in developing countries. Closely related to this "in formalization" of work is the feminization of work. Labor-intensive industries move to developing countries where women are the preferred labor force, because they can be hired at a low wage. Jobs become available for women, but only as unorganized laborers with no right to form unions or fight for their basic rights: the situation of women working in the garment industry is a case in point. Low-skilled jobs with low wages, long hours of work

and lack of job security are typical of the feminization of labor in unorganized sectors. The state generally supports the management and ignores any violation of the labor laws.

It is clear that the women are being exploited, but they may not raise their voices - not even against the sexual harassment they may face in the work place.

Women in the urban settings have become more independent and self-sufficient. The lower middle class is experiencing a shift in the way family relations worked. Traditionally women stayed at home taking care of domestic needs and children. Now most of the women are setting out of their private spaces to earn a living. Globalization has created certain needs based on capitalist sentiments. Advertising everyday reinforces new needs and creates a vicarious lust for more and more consumer good in the masses. This has resulted in families desiring more household income to be able to afford these items. Therefore, the women need to work and contribute to the household income to afford a certain lifestyle

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India is a union of women labourers willing to work hard and seize any work opportunities they might get. Globalization has aided their opportunities in various ways. SEWA has established a Women's Cooperative Bank with 125,000 members, and through the aid of globalization, they have even reached the women in the rural areas of India. Markets in different areas can now be reached by Indian women who have a part in businesses, or by craft-making women who have licenses to export their goods. With more freedoms and opportunities, these women are raising their standard of living by generating more income.

Technology that may seem out-dated to the United States is viewed as modern technology to India. With the aid of satellites and computers, SEWA has been able to reach more women to share self-help knowledge. Even the telephone is advancement to many women in their business ventures. After one of the SEWA women took out a loan of four dollars to buy a telephone, her income was increased because she could reach more people.

Some examples are: one of the SEWA women, Mauna Dave, has made tremendous advancements and is sharing her knowledge of the global world and economy with other Indian women so they can establish a better life for themselves. Dave attributes the skills she has obtained to SEWA since she had the opportunity to speak and listen to other women in this organization. This UNIFEM Social Responsibility Award recipient is the director of Kutch craft, which is an association of 110 craftswomen's groups with over 6,000 employees. She helped organize the craftswomen into an empowered group that have obtained bargaining power to compete in the international market. Dave said that some of the most difficult challenges are to keep current on the global economy and the fast-paced changes in India itself. Globalization has helped her and other Indian women share ideas and network in the international markets (UNIFEM).

The effect has a lot to do with liberalization. Globalization has given women a stronger voice. People are more accepting of women's rights. Women are more vocal. Women's lib started in the 70s and is beginning to grow and is on an upward spring. There has been a noticeable change in what women can do and what their opportunities are. The government has done more advertising (TV and radio commercials) portraying women in leadership roles and being in the army.

Different non-profit organizations have been brought to India from around the globe. These organizations have

given women the skills they need to advance, such as literacy and vocational skills. One organization, India corps, has brought in a range of programs to help women help themselves. One program in Ahmedabad, India has taught poor women how to create different crafts to generate income. With this program, women are able to earn their own personal money and enable the children to attend school instead of having to work to make more money. The women also gain business skills that inform them about career opportunities.

The women in rural settings have been influenced by globalization through media and through numerous intervention programs –non-profit organizations- that are constantly investing in women's issues in big way. These NGOs are creating awareness and proposing ways of change. The women are increasingly empowered and stronger than before. This change is not universal and does not happen in any particular pattern. Hence, we can observe pockets of changes due to efforts of a few. We need more such interventions and investments so that this work can continue.

Media can be viewed as a positive aspect of globalization. Media has the opportunity to reach people, and convey a message to people all over the world. A magazine called Femina is the top women's magazine for Indian women. It was created in 1959 and since it showcased its website in 1996, it has received much feedback from Indians all over the world. Femina shows the accomplishments of different Indian women from all over and provides inspiration to the women who read it. Although most women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another, much of their work is not documented or accounted for in official statistics. Women plough fields and harvest crops while working on farms, women weave and make handicrafts while working in household industries, women sell food and gather wood while working in the informal sector. Additionally, women are traditionally responsible for the daily household chores (e.g., cooking, fetching water, and looking after children). Since Indian culture hinders women's access to jobs in stores, factories and the public sector, the informal sector is particularly important for women. There are estimates that over 90 per cent of workingwomen are involved in the informal sector.

The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, small trader, artisan, or field laborer on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled and low paying and do not provide benefits to the worker. More importantly, however, cultural practices vary from region to region. Though it is a broad generalization, North India tends to be more patriarchal and feudal than South India. Women in northern India have more restrictions placed on their behaviour, thereby restricting their access to work. Southern India tends to be more egalitarian, women have relatively more freedom, and women have a more prominent presence in society. Cultural restrictions however are changing, and women are freer to participate in the formal economy, though the shortage of jobs throughout the country contributes to low female employment. But in the recent years, conditions of working women in India have improved considerably. More and more women find themselves in positions of respect and prestige; more and more workplaces are now populated with women who work on equal terms as men. Working is no longer an adjustment, a mere necessity; but a means to self-worth and growth.

Women have now not only found their place in work places but are also want their part in governance. In recent years there have been explicit moves to increase women's political

participation. Women have been given representation in the Panchayati Raj system as a sign of political empowerment. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At the central and state levels too women are progressively making a difference. Today we have woman as President of India and few women Chief Ministers in large states of India. The Women's reservation policy bill is slated to further strengthen political participation.

Women today are more practical and rational than earlier. Indian women have never been as expressive and independent as she is today. Today's women no more feel.

4. Negative Effects

Globalization has had negative implications for Indian women. Their plights are similar to those of women in other developing regions such as Africa and Asia. Globalization has made many international corporations richer by the billions. However, what most people are not aware of is that women in these developing countries are suffering enormously due to this expansion of corporate empires. According to estimates from World Development Indicators, "Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food, but earn only ten per cent of the world's income, and own less than one per cent of the world's property."

According to Vandana Shivea, and Indian economist and scholar, globalization along with the support of organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have created slave wages. These wages are not necessarily the result of "unjust" societies, but of the fact that global trade devalues the worth of people's lives and work. While globalization has brought jobs to rural, developing areas such as India where there was previously no employment, these jobs seem to be wolves in sheep's clothing. The work available to women is almost always poorly paid, mentally and physically unhealthy, demeaning, or insecure.

Women are suffering two fold. As women in developing countries move into the work force, their domestic responsibilities are not alleviated. Women work two full time jobs. One in a factory, where they are paid next to nothing, the second is in the home where they are paid nothing. According to Merlin A. Taber and Sushma Batra, editors of the book *Social Strains of Globalization in India*, development for poor women has meant the migration of men to cities, higher prices for commodities, poorer job opportunities. "The mixture of corporate capitalism and Western culture models is dissolving family and community social controls as witnessed by higher rates of family violence, rape, divorce, and family breakdown."

One example of women's labour being exploited would be the Noida Export Processing Zone, which is 24 km from New Delhi. These "zones" prefer to hire women because they are "more docile and more productive in men." In short, they are easier to control and less likely to retaliate against less than ideal working conditions, which are exactly what thousands of women encounter 12 hours a day. The zone is dangerous, hot, and unsanitary. Unnecessary body searches are routine. There are no maternity benefits and minimum wage is never enforced. Women who become pregnant or marry are immediately fired. Overtime is compulsory but women are paid lower rates than men. In order to avoid being fired, women turn to unsafe abortions performed by unqualified "doctors." In the zone, "respiratory problems, pelvic inflammatory disease, and sever cases of dehydration and anemia are common."

Some examples are: Globalization has affected India in many ways. There has been a progressive change towards Americanization. TV and media are influenced by pop culture. Globalization means more liberalization because India is pretty conservative. We really see the changes in the metropolitan areas. People's moral attitudes have become more relaxed, if not lax. Globalization has relaxed moral attitudes. Smoking and drinking is more accepted for women, so much to the point that such behaviour by women has become a symbol of empowerment.

There has also been an increased emphasis on women's rights at the grass roots level. There has been a shift towards some women becoming more traditional in their dress and language, while at the same time, they are progressing toward empowerment. Other women, empower themselves by becoming more Western in their style of dress. Dating is also more acceptable, depending on the parents. Women have to work so much harder to get an equal standing in society, and their credibility is constantly questioned. We are still dealing with getting females in school and eradicating female infanticide. Contraception use is still an issue as well.

Globalization is more bad than good. It has undermined state sovereignty in so many ways. Globalization is just the spread of corporations who are accountable to no one, with no checks and balances. The idea that capitalism and democracy go together is absurd.

The intervention of mass media (satellite television in specific) coincided with the economic liberalization in India. Satellite television is predicated on western values and has been in conflict with the Indian value system. It has created tensions for an average Indian family. What the people are seeing on television is no more consistent with the native Indian expectations.

In the rural sectors, women have been independent and strong-headed. They have been the primary breadwinners in several cases. The society does not want to accept this truth where women can be self-sufficient and need not rely on men for their survival. However, the traditional roles continue to influence our worldview and we continue to believe that women are oppressed. They are in ways that are characteristic of patriarchal societies. It is not asserting that women are free and empowered but certainly offering a fresh perspective that conveys to the western reader that women in the rural dwellings are more capable of taking care of themselves than in urban cities.

Globalisation has had adverse effects on women especially in the developing countries. As consumers, women are increasingly facing a consumer culture which reduces them to commodities and as producers; women are exposed to work exploitation and occupational hazards. Owing to their many roles, as would-be mothers, as mothers responsible for the health of their children and families, as working women at home and outside they are major consumers of healthcare products. In recent years a serious issue has come to light where many products related to women's health, found to be dangerous and banned or restricted in the developed countries, were marketed in the developing countries. Transnational Corporations (TNCs) see the developing world as a convenient dumping ground for these products and medicines. Of late many TNCs have located some of their manufacturing plants and industries in the developing countries due to the easy availability of cheap labour. As producers also women have to suffer exploitation in terms of low wages, poor working environment, instability of employment, and denial of right to representation.

The women's movement has to fight for change at all levels. Women have to work for self-empowerment through engagement in action at multiple levels. Various international agencies are also working in this direction. As the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation underscores, globalisation is a multidimensional process of economic, political, cultural, and ideological change. It has had a mixed impact on women's rights. On the one hand, it has led to increasing violations of women's economic, political, and cultural rights in large measure due to the withering away of the welfare state, the feminisation of poverty, the expansion of religious fundamentalism, and new forms of militarism and conflict. It has been noted by many international women's organisations, for example, that the new trade agreements contravene the spirit and often the letter of international conventions on human rights, labour rights, and women's rights. On the other hand, aspects of globalisation have provided women with increasing opportunities to work in solidarity at regional, national and international levels to demand their rights. Their objective is to help promote mechanisms that strengthen the positive aspects and consequences of globalisation, especially with respect to women's rights and gender equality.

Another related issue is of the state's retreat from social responsibility and its impact on women's health and livelihood. However, limited concerns about public welfare have always been under global capitalism, the extension of the market economy to virtually every remote atoll or mountain village has revealed the ties governments have to multinational corporations. Neoliberalism, the most recent form of global capitalism, has confronted notions of the public good with plans for privatisation of all productive resources.¹

Further, structural adjustment includes strict population control policies which are seen as panacea for economic growth. This thinking reflects the traditional Western concept which views the problem of food security and starvation in Malthusian terms; rising populations overtake food availability, shortages occur. Without negating the importance of population control, I would like to stress that "ultimately the food problem is not concerned just with the availability of food but with the disposition of food. That involves economics, politics and even law. Starvations and malnutrition are related ultimately to ownership and exchange in addition to production possibility."² This calls into question the operations of international capitalism.

Thus no doubt there are some redeeming features of the economic reform process like reduced role of the state in forestry and greater and easier access to international markets for poor women's products. But in the long run it is imperative to manage and mitigate the negative consequences of liberalisation and mechanisation by enhancing women's skills and innovations as well as developing insurance cover so as to minimise the risks they endure. This calls for direct interventions so as not to marginalise a very important section of society in the race for economic development and empowerment.

5. Conclusion

The roles of women in India have been changing and they are now emerging from the past traditions into a new era of freedom and rights due to globalization. Women have made great strides in the corporate world but still the patriarchal nature of Indian society stops from having careers that infringe too much on family life.

Women are now supporting their families with dual incomes thereby increasing the voice not only at home but also at Parliament for 50 % Reservation as they are contributing to Indian Economy at large.

They have dual roles to play – as unpaid servant at home and as paid servant in an organization. Not only this, they have to undergo stress & tensions at both places. Women today, consider themselves as the true `ardhangini of their husbands. She is more cognizant of his world today and she understands his work pressures. It is widely felt that earning power allows them to voice their opinions on bigger decisions.

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