

IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON WOMEN IN INDIA OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract : Within the past two decades, globalization has created a tremendous impact on the lives of women especially in developing countries. Globalization can be defined as “a complex economic, political, cultural, and geographic process in which the mobility of capital, organizations, ideas, discourses, and peoples has taken a global or transnational form”. Globalisation is a process of increasing integration, interconnectedness and interdependence, of economies and societies to such an extent that an occurrence in one part of the planet affects people in other parts of world. In 2000, the Beijing+5 highlighted that globalisation presents opportunities to some women but leads to marginalization of many others. On the one hand it may create new opportunities for women to be forerunners in economic and social progress. On the other hand it may exacerbate gender inequality in a patriarchal society especially in the developing world. Alternatively, although globalisation is creating a demand for female employment that brings about an array of opportunities and a sense of independence but at the same time the problem of the glass ceiling, the ‘feminization of poverty’ among others continues to exist. Many studies showed that globalization has suddenly opened up in the Indian economy at a very high speed without the required economic and social policies to provide the much required safety net which adversely affected women in India. With this background, this paper mainly focuses on the impact of globalisation on women in India. Further, the study reveals that the forces of globalisation under umbrella of neo-liberalism has reduced women to commodities and as producers, women are exposed to work exploitation and occupational hazards, low wages, poor working environment, instability of employment and so on.

Key words: Globalisation, India, Marginalization, Neo-liberalism, Women.

Introduction : Within the past two decades, globalization has created a tremendous impact on the lives of women in developing nations. According to a United Nations Development Fund for Women over the past two decades the process of globalisation has contributed to widening inequality within and among countries, coupled with economic and social collapse in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and countries in transition like in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and financial crises in Asia and Latin America. The process of globalisation must be reshaped so that it is more people-centered instead of profit-centered and more accountable to women. Gender equality is critical to the development process. The process of globalisation may have resulted in new avenues of growth, but due to unequal distribution of its benefits women have been adversely affected in many cases. It calls for creating opportunities for women to be part of this development process. Merely enacting legislation will not help. What is required is its proper implementation.

This paper mainly focuses on the impact of globalisation on women in India. Additionally, this paper has highlighted the favourable and unfavourable effects of globalisation on women in India. The paper is divided into four parts. First parts discuss the phenomenon globalisation vis-a-vis women. The second part analysed the favourable and

unfavourable effects of globalisation on women in India. The conclusion is dealt in the final part.

Globalisation and Women : Globalization can be defined as “a complex economic, political, cultural, and geographic process in which the mobility of capital, organizations, ideas, discourses, and peoples has taken a global or transnational form (Moghadam 1999). With the establishment of international free trade policies, such as North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and GATT, transnational corporations are using the profit motive to guide their factories toward developing nations in search of “cheap” female labour. Corporations prefer female labour over male labour because women are considered to be “docile” workers, who are willing to obey production demands at any price. In developing nations, certain types of work, such as garment assembly, is considered to be an extension of female household roles.

Globalization is a double edged process as far as women are concerned. On the one hand, majority of women in India and other developing countries find themselves stripped off the benefit of social security, government subsidy protection of labour rights and the safety nets. On the other hand, there were possibilities of better education facilities and opportunities at the transnational sense which are very attractive to the privileged few. It is, however, necessary to understand that effective development requires full integration of women in the

development process as agents of change as well as beneficiaries because Indian women can be utilized as development resources in many ways.

Favourable Effects of Globalisation on Women

Globalization has opened by broader communication lines and brought more companies as well as different worldwide organizations into India. This provides opportunities for not only working women, but also women who are becoming a larger part of the work force. With new jobs for women, there are opportunities for higher pay, which raises self-confidence and brings about empowerment among women. This in turn provides equality between men and women, 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 (Rajput, 1994).

On the positive side, globalization has contributed to bring about welcome changes in the lives of women who have been able to avail of the opportunities, which have opened up in the various sectors of development. These are as following:

- i. Enhanced paid work opportunities for women as a result of marketization, privatization and larger foreign investment.
- ii. The scope for productivity and wage increase is greater with new technology.
- iii. A large number of opportunities in the export oriented industries such as computer software, modern food processing, handicrafts where India enjoys comparative advantage are now available to women.
- iv. The rapid growth expected from the new economic policy is expected to generate large employment opportunities for both men and women. Besides, the policy will provide greater opportunities for migration and vertical mobility.
- v. The introduction of modern household gadgets is expected to reduce the drudgery of women associated with the domestic work.
- vi. The new economic climate under which decentralization, individualized based working is likely to increase may reduce the burden on the women. Women can perform some of the jobs at home without sacrificing the other tasks such as home managers, child bearers, and care takers.
- vii. Prospects of higher and quality education have become feasible for those women who can afford them, economically and socially.
- viii. Employment in technological and other advanced sectors, which have global bearing, has opened up for suitably qualified women.

- ix. With changing attitude towards women, especially in the urban areas, women enjoy more egalitarian set of gender relationship.
- x. Augmentation of women's movements through exposures at the international level will help bring about major changes in the economic, social and political lives of women.
- xi. Reduction in gender inequalities will have positive effect on women's empowerment in the socio-economic context.
- xii. Attitudinal changes towards women's role in the family due to good education, benefits of family planning and health care, child care, good job opportunities etc., will surely help in the development of more confident and healthy women.

Unfavourable Effects of Globalisation on Women

Globalization has had negative implication for Indian women. Their plight is similar to those of women in other developing regions such as Africa and Asia. According to Vandana Shiva, an Indian eco-feminist 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 track devalues the worth of peoples' lives and work. Though globalization has brought jobs to rural India, the work available to women is almost always poorly paid, mentally and physically unhealthy, decreasing or insecure. Women are suffering two fold. Further, 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 (Siwal, B.R., 1998).

One of the most significant social effects of the new global international economy has been the enormous numbers of women joining the economically active populations of all countries both as wage earning employees and as self-employed workers. Women have traditionally carried out socially productive work in the household and in childcare, in the cultivation of the land and in the paid activities of the man/head of the family (Jayati Ghosh, 2000).

Thus, the new economic policy reforms have had positive as well as negative impact on women in general and rural women in particular. For instance, traditional role of women in agriculture, livestock and animal husbandry, khadi and village industries including handicrafts, handlooms fisheries, etc. is being undermined because mechanization and automation is becoming prevalent in the market-based economy which will adversely affect the village-based traditional economy.

Globalisation has had adverse effects on women especially in the developing countries including

India. 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.

According to 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.

Last but not least, the state's retreat from social responsibility and its impact on women's health and livelihood. With the disappearing social and financial safety nets and government subsidy, the poverty alleviation programmes, universal education and woman oriented health programmes will be adversely affected. Neo-liberalism, the most recent form of global capitalism, has confronted notions of the public good with plans for privatization of all productive resources (Kalpana: 2001). In the neoliberal work practices, contract work, unsocial hours, the women have to bear the triple burden of caring, farming and paid employment in the rural sector.

Conclusion : The impact of globalization on women varies across the centuries as well as from sector to sector within countries. In most cases globalization expands opportunities for women in work place, but it does not remove barriers to advancement, ameliorate the predominance of low paying menial jobs held by women. Further, long working hours, relatively lower wages, the mass of influx of women into low-paid work and insecure working conditions in the globalized economies have led to family breakdowns and many other social problems. This reminds the early periods of the industrial revolution and is one of the most important social effects of the new type of economy. In summary, globalization plays a definite role in increasing opportunities for women in the work place. It does not however solve the problems of the movement of women beyond low-paying and menial jobs. In addition, it may exaggeration, the effect of recession which has traditionally hurt women more than men. Globalization has changed the intra-household responsibilities for males and females, where females are given more responsibility over the survival of the family but at the same time depicting women as sellable commodities.

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