Women Empowerment In Changing Indian Society

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Abstract

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 critically evaluate the impact of globalization on women in India and also to know the positive & negative impacts of it on the position of women in India present. At the same time this paper also through light on the contribution of women in the economic development in India and share of women workforce in the economy.

Key words: Women empowerment, Globalization, Effect of Globalization, Factors of Effective Globalization, Economic Development etc.

“It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing.”

-Swami Vivekananda

INTRODUCTION
Historically, women in India and birth of girl were widely believed to mark the arrival of Lakhsmi- the goddess of wealth and riches. Women have been considered “janani”, i.e. the progenitor and “ardhangini”, i.e. half of body. Women are also considered to be an embodiment of goddess Durga. Inspite of all no society treats its women as well as men. Despite of various changes in the status and role of women in the society and development in the position or
station women, the condition is continuing to decline. As Kofi Annan stressed, “No development strategy is more beneficial to society as a whole than treating men and women alike.”

Status is a sociological concept. An individual as a member of society occupies a no. of statuses. It is the summation of these statuses that gives a person a ‘station’ in the social system. A woman enjoys various roles as mother, wife and sister and ranked accordingly. But a mother compared to father, a wife compared to husband and a sister compared to brother is ranked differently. When we talk about the status of women, we are referring to the position of a woman, which she has by virtue of her being a woman. This is different from the status of a particular woman as compared to other woman. Here our concern is to evaluate how women as women are treated as compared to men as men. We see, the status of women in Indian society has been considered lower than that of men. This is closely related to the Indian kinship and economic system which assigns a subordinate and secondary role to woman in the family and consequently in the society. India today, a country where women are becoming more prominent, yet increasing numbers, increasing participation and 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. The Constitution of India guarantees equality of sexes and in fact grants special favors 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.

Globalization

Globalization refers to the free movement of goods, capital, services, people, technology and information. It is the action or procedure of
international integration of countries arising from the convergence of world views, products, ideas, and other aspects of culture.

Advances in the means of transport, such as the steam locomotive, steamship, jet engine, and container ships and in telecommunications infrastructure including the rise of the telegraph and its modern offspring, the Internet and mobile phones have been major factors in globalization, generating further interdependence of economic and cultural activities. In 2000, the International Monetary Fund identified four basic aspects of globalization; they are trade and transactions, capital and investment movements, migration and movement of people and the dissemination of knowledge.

As a result of globalization, the lives of women also get affected. The global recognition of problem of women led the United Nations to declare the year 1975 as Women’s Year and the decade as 1975-1985 as women’s decades. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women, key among them is the ratification of the CONVENTION ON ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW) in 1993.

Women Empowerment

Women Empowerment is a word when we spell, most of the time it is misunderstood or misguided as it is similar to “feminism”. But it is not like that. Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. It refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women and to make them confident enough to claim their rights. We can say women empowerment is similar to “equalism”.

Therefore it can be sited that, Women empowerment is to empower women by promoting their participation in all areas and sectors to build stronger economies, improve their quality of life and bring gender equality.
Globalization Effects on Women Empowerment

Globalization is helping most of the countries to eliminate the discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child. It is providing equal access to health care, quality education at all levels, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and ensuring provisions of the women basic needs. Various programs have been initiated globally. Such as, ensure food security, arrange for housing and shelter, provide equal education, devise a holistic approach to women health, formulate macro economic and social policies for women participation in economic development and arrange support services like child care facility etc.

Globalization 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, globalization 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 marginalization of women in the informal labor sector or impoverishment through loss of traditional sources of income.

Positive Effects of Globalization

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. 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 laborers willing to work hard and seize any work opportunities they might get. 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. 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.

**Negative Effects of Globalization**

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 percent of the world’s income, and own less than one percent of the world’s property”. According to Vandana Shiva, an 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.

**Women's Contribution to the Economy**

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 any 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 i.e. 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 percent of working women 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 behavior, 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 free 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 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 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 women Chief Ministers in large states of India. The Women's reservation policy bill is slated to further strengthen political participation. Apart from this, women’s participation in election to use their voting right has also increased in last Lok Sabha election and Vidhan Sabha election of various states too.
**Important Factors for Making Effective Globalization on Women Empowerment**

In last two decades technological development has created a tremendous impact on the lives of the women in the developing nations. As globalization contains “a complex economic, political, cultural and geographic process in which the mobility of the capital, organizations, ideas, discourses and people have taken global or trans-national form, 2000”. All this is possible due to electronic development like intranet, internet, mobiles, telephones, satellites, cellular phones. Moreover with the establishment of international free trade policies such as NORTH AMERICA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (NAFTA), trans-national corporation are using the profits motives to guide their factories toward developing nation in search of “cheap female labor”. They prefer female labor over male labor because women are considered to be “docile” workers, who are willing to obey production demand at any price. Therefore to make globalization more effective for both women and women empowerment, there are some suggestions given below.

**Suggestions:**

1. Holding workshops to learn global women empowerment schemes.
2. Holding some national and international conferences.
3. Making internet accessible to women conveniently.
4. Subscribing for journals related to the policy, supporting globalization and women empowerment schemes, which must be updated with latest news and relevant information about women empowerment globally in that.

**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.

We realize that changes in social attitudes and institutions cannot be brought very rapidly. It is, however, necessary to accelerate this process of change by deliberate and planned efforts. Responsibility for this acceleration has to be shouldered by the state and community, particularly that section of the community which believes in the equality, and legislators who have helped to frame laws and the Government which is responsible for implementing them.

References