

# Globalization and Working Women in India: Unearthing the Linkage Using Sociological Lens

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**ABSTRACT:** Indian independence had little meaning to its women. As the country freed itself from foreign domination, Indian women retrieved their steps into the household. The country could now govern itself without owing its allegiance to anyone but itself, however the same fate was not be blessed upon its women. Masculine superiority proclaimed that it was shameful for women to work outside their homes since paid employment would insult the rightful obligation of men to provide for their families. Working women thus formed a miniscule minority who primarily remained involved in agricultural activities, informal sectors, and traditional industries with greater investment in the unrewarding but equally exacting domestic work. Thus, in the economically meaningful activities, there was a visible disparity between the participation rates of men and women until the 1990s.

The mixed economic model which run Indian economy from 1952 to 1991, characterized this disparity. During the span of almost four decades, women also remained significantly underrepresented in the Parliament with the total percentage of women occupying seats in the Lok Sabha being dismally low: the lowest being 3.4 percent and the highest being 8.2 percent of the total number of seats in the popular chamber of the Indian parliament. The numerical deprivation paints the picture of a hardly surprising reality: women's interests couldn't be identified with the interests of the state as political rulers were predominately male. I could safely say that women's interests found very little credibility in the structuring and restructuring that took place in India following its independence, in the socio-political-economic spheres. Women were not free to construct or develop their own identities but had to succumb to patriarchal values ever so often in imagining themselves and their future. That this is not an angry feminist's unfounded claim is proved by "Towards Equality", a report by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1971, which revealed, that even after three decades of planned development, there had been a veritable decline in the social, economic, and political status of women in society. It also exposed the marginalization of rural women and the women living at the subsistence level.

**KEYWORDS:** women working, India, globalization, linkage, sociological lens, unearthing, marginalization

## I. INTRODUCTION

But this was the story of an era gone by, argued the defenders of 21<sup>st</sup> century neo-liberal economy. It was claimed that the undisguised male bias in the Indian economic sector was to change with India's growing fascination for liberalization since the state interventionist economic scheme had proved to be fatal for its own health. The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thus, made us believe that globalization was the answer to India's economic problems and the socio-cultural ones generating from it. Privatization started generating huge employment as a result of which many women could find paid work far easily than they did in the pre-reform era. The defenders of the globalized economy which India was adapting itself to forcefully argued that their arrangement prompted economic growth leading to the rise of income and living standards. Inevitably hence greater educational and economic opportunities follow which privilege women a great deal.[1] They site instances of the pre-reform era when women had access to neither education nor income. The result was their dismal socio-economic-political status in society. Globalization has rescued women from getting trapped into this mire further, is the defenders' common claim. Many have argued that women from developing countries like India have been employed in impressive numbers in the industries in export processing zones which are indomitably national "growth poles". Large scale employment that globalization has generated is due to the opening of greater communication lines and more labour-intensive companies as well as various multi-national corporations, call centres, BPOs who generously employ women. Liberalism thus finds strong ground of defence for itself.

It is undeniable that there has been a feminization of the labour force in India ever since it opened up its economy to the world at large. Women are now more assertive of having identities independent of socio-cultural obligations. But the impression that globalization forces upon us, that a neo-liberal economy is the only viable antidote to gender injustice in India, is not irrefutable. A careful look into the arrangement reveals a bigger and a slightly scarier picture.[2]

In a labour surplus but capital scarce country like India, the capitalist class has an additional leverage. It is considered the major, if not the only, instrument to revive a dying economy. It is the contention of many developmental, welfare-statist liberals. With the new economic reforms, even though employment opportunities have increased by leaps and bounds, weak immobile labour have been left at the mercy of mobile and powerful capital. Legislation is in essence pro-capitalist. The bargaining power of labour, irrespective of gender, is rapidly on the decline but women workers have found themselves at a greater disadvantage. This “greater disadvantage” can be explained through a pyramidal structure, formed with the help of the status of identities and their bearing on society. Upper class and upper caste men are at the helm of this structure whereas women from lower castes and classes form its lowest rung. The bargaining power of lower caste, lower class women in this structure is much lesser, not only from upper caste and upper class men but also than that of men with similar socio-economic backgrounds as them. Globalization has escalated the social and economic marginalization of women particularly forming the lower rungs. Their bargaining power is a reflection of their status in society. The huge employment of women workers is a result of the preference of both formal and informal sector recruiters towards women since they are perceived as anti-trade union, docile workers who can be easily made to accept unfair terms of bargain and can also be retrenched citing incompetence or their reproductive responsibilities.

This is due to the fact that since women were barred from any sector of employment that was not considered essentially female in the pre-reform era, what or how much they could contribute in the “economically meaningful” areas of activity was rendered highly suspect in the post-reform era. Thus, even though women were being recruited in huge numbers and they proved to be efficient workers, the myth of their inferiority was perpetuated to secure the command of patriarchy over them.[3] But it’s curious how it has come to cost patriarchy instead. The capitalist knows that women are more efficient and less demanding workers than men. So, to cut down on labour costs they have often replaced men with women. Men have lost jobs to women. But women are in no way winners. They are exploited in various ways at home and outside. Even though at the upper end of the hierarchy, women do have relatively higher paying jobs but they are seldom company bosses, they seldom wield authority positions. The glass ceiling persists with all its glory in patriarchal settings. Hire and Fire policies that characterize the casualization of workforce today are successful because of low-skilled, low waged women workers. Flexible labour practices in the liberalization era has worsened women worker’s vulnerability. In the Export Processing Zones in the absence of protective labour legislations women workers especially are rendered susceptible to exploitation. Apart from their rights as workers being denied in these zones, they are also sexually harassed and humiliated. Dignity of labour is a utopia best not taken seriously.[4]

## II. DISCUSSION

Let’s get the blunt truth out: neoliberal economic model discriminates on the basis of gender, no matter what liberal proponents would have you believe. Corporations are reinforcing women’s subordinate position in the family and society by offering them employment and wages that sustain this position. In this regard: capitalism and patriarchy work hand-in-glove in this regard. Women due to their own socio-economic constraints are often in no position to not succumb to the manipulation offered by persistent efforts of the two. Hence, it is no wonder hence that feminization of jobs has paradoxically maintained feminization of poverty. Market economy has been unilaterally calling the shots manipulating this system of subordination to their advantage. Rigorous gender socialization and the unequal power relationship that men and women share has everything to do with women’s self-perception[5] and how they perceive their male counterparts. They feel they deserve less because men deserve more. Socio-economic-political equality is considered impossible under prevailing differences in the identities and experiences of the sexes. Since age old traditions are looked at with fond nostalgia and every attempt is made at sanctifying them in various ways, it is but obvious that the present situation will not deviate from what the antiquated customs dictate. It will at the most be modified to benefit the capitalist.

“Patriarchy, reformed or unreformed, is patriarchy still: its worst abuses purged or foresworn, it might actually be more stable and secure than before.” Kate Millet famously remarked in her seminal work *Sexual Politics*. [6]

Positive impact:

- Increased employment opportunities
- Increased educational investment in girl child by parents due to earning prospects
- Economic liberalisation served as a catalyst to thrust women into the limelight in India
- Attracted more companies as well as different organizations into India which provided opportunities for not only working men, but also women
- Higher education and pay 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 treatment towards women to afford them an equal stance in society.

Negative impact:

- World Trade Organisation regulations have brought about a change in national policies so as to allow the free entry of foreign corporations, to give more incentives to big businesses rather than to small firms, and to lift import controls on agricultural products. This has resulted in further marginalisation of rural and indigenous women.
- Women do two thirds of the world's work, receive ten percent of world's income and own one percent of the means of production. This is the present picture of women workers in the era of globalization.
- Although the humiliation, harassment and exploitation of women have been commonplace throughout history, such treatment has become more widespread with globalization.
- Out of the total 397 million workers in India, 123.9 million are women and of these women 96% of female workers are in the unorganized sector. Accordingly, although more women are now seeking paid employment, a vast majority of them obtain only poorly paid, unskilled jobs in the informal sector, without any job security or social security.

### III. RESULTS

- Health:
  - Additionally working women in India are more likely to be subjected to intense exploitation; they are exposed to more and more risks that cause health hazards and are forced to endure greater levels of physical and mental stress.
  - It is not only in the unorganized sector or in small enterprises, but also in the modern sectors like the Information Technology and the automobile sectors where working women are forced to work for 12 hours while the local governments ignore this open flouting of the labor laws
  - The uncertainties of obtaining work and the dire need to retain a position in the midst of intense competition cause mental tension, strained social relationships, psychological problems and chronic fatigue, all of which are difficult to prove as work-related.[7]
- Mechanisation: For example, several traditional industries where women work in large numbers like handloom and food processing have undergone changes in the forms of production with the introduction of machines, power looms etc, which have result in the loss of employment for large number of women.
- Hazards related to the attitude of society and family:
  - Though more and more women seek paid employment, the stereotypical attitude towards women and their perceived role in the familial hierarchy has not undergone much change.
  - Women continue to be perceived as weak, inferior, second-class citizens.
  - For working women, this discrimination is extended to the workplace also.
  - In addition, this perception that they alone are responsible for the domestic work, leads to a feeling of guilt when they are not able to look after the children or family members due to their official work, often resulting in emotional disorders.
- Sexual harassment in the workplace:[8]
  - One of the evils of the modern society is the sexual harassment female workers endure from their male counterparts and other members of the society.[9]

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Women are crucial facilitators for development. They serve a catalytic role towards realization of transformational economic, environmental and social transformations essential for sustainable development. But inadequate access to credit, health care and education are among the many problems they encounter. The worldwide agricultural and economic difficulties, as well as climate change, have added to the severity of the situation. Women's empowerment is essential not just for the well-being of individuals, families, and rural communities, but also for the overall economic productivity of the world's agricultural workforce, given the significant proportion of women in the agricultural labor globally (unwomen.org). Many of the worlds poorest are female. Eradicate poverty is a major concern for rural women. According to new World Bank poverty estimates, the number of persons living on less than \$1.25 per day declined from 47% in 1990 to 22% in 2010. Yet, 1.2 billion people remain poor (unwomen.org). Rural women are vital in ensuring food and nutrition security,

creating money, and enhancing rural lives and general well-being. Women and girls suffer institutional restraints everyday that deny them their human rights and impede their efforts to improve their own and others' lives. In this sense, they are an MDG target group. According to (Misra, Kunwar, & Kanojia, 2005), women's employment in the non-agriculture sector was rare. During the off-season, however, several rural women worked for non-agricultural wages. The study found that household income and women's educational status have a substantial impact on women's employment in the agriculture sector. This is supported by the fact that there is a negative link between socioeconomic characteristics and respondents' involvement in crop production. Women are heavily involved in dairy farming (65–70%). [10] In rural areas, women handle almost all of the dairy-related chores (Kumar, Tripathi, Sharma, & Dubey, 2017). The participation of Indian women in the country's progress is undeniable; however the intensity varies over time and geography. Women's significant involvement in agriculture, related occupations, and home tasks has been vastly overlooked. Rising demand for milk and milk products has made dairy farming a successful business for women (Mohapatra, Behera, & Sah, 2012). According to the Indian government, 85% of rural women raise livestock (Viswanathan, 1989). Women do more work than men in areas including fodder cutting, watering, animal care, and shed cleaning (Arshad, Muhammad, & Ashraf, 2013). SHGs are a significant tool for poor women's socioeconomic development, accelerating changes in income, occupation, social involvement, expenditure, decision making, and confidence (Bansode, Ankush, Mande, & Suradkar, 2013).

Globalization is a colorful and ambiguous term.[11] The globalization is an invention of American business schools. It suggests that only those companies preparing themselves in good time and without any reservations will be able to survive. Accordingly, the sole ones having a chance of survival are those who become global players, expanding their activities on a global scale, instead of restricting themselves to safeguarding local assets. Globalization does not only refer to the economic dimension, but also to communication technologies, ecology, organization of work, culture and the civil society. Globalization can be defined as “a complex, economic, political, cultural and geographical process in which the mobility of capital, organizations, ideas, discourses and people has taken a global or transactional form transnational corporations are using the profit motive to guide their factories towards developing nations in search of “cheap” female labor. Globalization is the process of growing, developing and expanding the business, services and technologies throughout the world. Globalization enthusiasts argue, will translate into higher rates of economic growth and improvements in people's standard of living. Globalization is increasing substantially and is creating new opportunities for especially developing countries, which are now able to attract foreign investors and foreign capital.[12,13]

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