
Globalization: A Boon or a Bane for Women

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Abstract:

Globalisation as a term has been defined and described by scholars, policy makers and businesses depending on the benefits that they have been seeking from it. While economists and businessmen have viewed globalisation as the removal of barriers to free trade and as a means to create one global market, sociologists have described it as the intensification of worldwide social relations where local events are shaped by happenings in distant places. It is a fact, however, that the economic benefits and consequences of globalisation and global economy have occupied most of the media and mind space of the participating nations. Globalization can bring in the lives of rural and underprivileged women if it is backed and supported by adequate and effective policy measures by the government.

Keywords:

Globalisation, Liberalisation, Trade, Economic, Production, Investment, Exploitation, Raw, Product

Introduction:

Globalization or liberalization of trade changed the economic activities around the globe. In the second half of the twentieth century, the entire world observed a major shift in the production related activities. Until the first half of the 20th century, production was mainly organized within countries. The import and export largely confined to raw materials and unfinished products. For instance, the colonies like India exported raw or unfinished

materials to the developed countries and imported finished goods and products. This system can simply be called trade. Trade was the main force behind connecting distant countries. The small companies and organizations operated during this period. But this system changed with the emergence of multinational companies (MNCs) or large companies. This shift could be seen as local to global, from within the country to outside the country. The MNCs operated at global level i.e. not in one nation but in more than one nation. The entire system of production, import and export took new and significant turn. The multinational companies searched for regions where they could get cheap labour force and other resources like raw material and road connectivity. The reason behind doing that was to earn profit by reducing the cost of production. The companies not only sold their products globally but also produced them globally. It naturally forced the companies to set up their plant at a place where it is close to markets and where there is easy availability of skilled and unskilled labour at fairly low or reasonable costs. The developing countries, in particular, became highly sought destinations due to the presence of cheap labour and profitable markets. These countries started changing their policies to attract MNCs as the developing countries considered it to be an opportunity to generate employment. The companies also preferred governments which promised to look after their interests. After

having an assurance, a company could think of investing money in land, building, machines and other equipments. Investment made in this way is called foreign investment. The purpose of investment is not to serve a nation but to earn profits. The approach of a company in such case is always utilitarian and self-centered. The result of foreign investment and trade has been greater integration of production and markets across countries. This process of interconnection and integration between countries is termed as Globalization.

Position post 1991:

The Indian government, before 1991, had put major check on foreign investment to protect the producers within the country from foreign competition. The Indian government found it difficult to remain aloof from the changing conditions around 1990s. In 1991, The government of India decided to make far reaching changes in its policy. The Indian policy makers unanimously agreed that the time had come for Indian producers and companies to compete with producers at global level. The powerful international organizations also supported this move of Indian government. The highly excited policy makers removed barriers on foreign trade and foreign investment. Removing restrictions set by the government is what is known as liberalization. This shift in policy paved the way for foreign companies to set up offices and factories in India. This policy made a significant departure from the past. It mainly focused on privatization, liberalization and globalization. Today, this new model emphasizes the role of market, export oriented growth and reduced state intervention. The

forces of globalization have influenced each and every aspect of life. The global network or connections have made their lasting impressions on social, political and cultural life of people. There are always references to global culture and integration of the world economy. We know that the condition of women is secondary in the social structure of many countries. Hence, they have always been the victims of change. The same is true in the case of globalization. The Indian society, like many others, is patriarchal in which a woman is considered and compared to goddess on religious basis but practically she is taken to be secondary and most neglected being. In the social fabric of India, women lack education and their participation in economic activities is negligible. In fact, women are the victim of inequality and backwardness. Globalization is a complex process and its impact is neither consistent nor equal in all the countries and regions. This complex nature of globalization has given rise to debate among global thinkers regarding its impact on women. Many scholars argue that globalization is a boon for women as it has enabled them to participate in economic activities at global level. On the other hand, there is no dearth of thinkers who consider it to be a cause of exploitation of women mainly in developing countries like India. Moreover, it has made an adverse impact on the poor and marginalized groups. The present paper is, thus, a sincere effort to study whether globalization is a boon or bane for women. The main focus would be to analyze the impact of globalization on the poor and marginalized women.



The concept of globalization is not completely new. It existed in ancient times but the influence, impact and nature of globalization was different. The society was not entirely commercial as we have in present times. The spirit of universal brotherhood was prevalent in the countries like India. The barter system was the basis of trade and the scope of exploitation at mass level was hardly noticeable. In today's world, globalization is a matter of discussion among academicians and administrators. Globalization is basically a multi-dimensional phenomenon and complex process. It may be defined as the ongoing economic, technological, social and political integration of the world that began after the Second World War (Asian Development Outlook: 2001). Its impact and implications are many fold particularly in the context of poor women.

At present, women are playing an important role both in the developed and the developing countries. The reports and surveys proved that the condition of women changed rapidly after the beginning of globalization. The multinational companies gave employment to the youths of developing countries and the number of women has also been remarkable. The spread of education and technology changed the approach and attitude of society towards women. Women started joining companies and achieved financial independence, a step towards equality. She came out of her traditional role of a woman. She left kitchen and needle work and engaged herself in the progress of nation. This involvement was not only at local but also at

global level. Here, we need to remember that India is a Third world country and the number of the poor and needy is very high. The world reports and results need to be analyzed in Indian context. The Indian women cannot compete at global level without proper training and social security. The negative side of globalization cannot be ignored. The poor women have suffered due to the implementation of new economic policies.

The most suffered group is of women as they constitute socially and economically backward community. They found it difficult to cope with the liberalized and global market. The supporters of globalization highlight the benefits of global market created in the form of opportunities like employment and market oriented production but they forget to see its negative impact on the life of marginalized groups. The neglected groups suffer and this suffering is transferred to women as she being secondary and most neglected person of society particularly among poor and destitute. In 2005, National Women Commission conducted a study to understand the impact of globalization on the women working in agriculture sector. The results clearly revealed negative change on women working in agriculture. It is, no doubt, true that globalization offered unlimited opportunities to women in the informal and unorganized sector. It is also a fact that they were employed on irregular basis and the payment has been less than their male counterparts. They have not been given the right to form a union or to raise their voice against exploitation. The lack of proper welfare schemes has made the poor working women

habitual to working in bad and unhygienic conditions. Actually, this process has encouraged 'feminization of poverty'. The benefit of globalization is limited i.e. the educated women of cities who could afford to work on their own conditions.

The Beijing+5 Document (2001), notes that globalization presents opportunities to some women but leads to marginalization of many others. It advocates mainstreaming in order to achieve gender equality. Globalization affects different groups of women in different places in different ways. It is ironic that on the one hand it may create new opportunities for women but on the other hand it may lead to unemployment and lack of opportunities. The global communication networks and cross-cultural exchange have changed the status of women but not to a very large extent. It has given rise to gender inequality in a patriarchal society, especially in the developing world. In the economic field it may lead to further marginalization of women in the informal labour sector or impoverishment through loss of traditional sources of income. Development and equality cannot be separated. The process of development leads nowhere in the absence of gender equality. The process of globalization may have resulted in new opportunities of growth, but due to unequal distribution of its benefits women have been badly affected in many cases. The problem cannot be resolved just by enacting legislation. It is going to be of no use in the absence of proper implementation.

Critics of liberalization argue that following the World Trade Organization regulations the

states have changed their policies regarding foreign investment. They offer incentives and tax benefits to big business houses rather than to small firms and companies. The states have lifted import barriers on agricultural products. This has become the major cause of marginalization of rural and indigenous women. The process of globalization has given rise to privatization and has also increased women's unpaid work as social services are privatized.

The Impact of globalization is noticeable on women especially in the developing countries. As consumers, women are increasingly facing a consumer culture which reduces them to commodities. The rise of individualism and consumerism accompanied by globalization promotes materialism. The development of fashion and cosmetic industries has led to consider women as commodity. Due 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, the products related to women's health which were found to be dangerous and banned or restricted in the developed countries, were marketed in the developing countries. These products are used by the women of these countries. Transnational Corporations (TNCs) think that the developing world is a safe and convenient dumping ground for these dangerous and banned products and medicines. This attitude shows their inhuman approach towards developing countries. Another surprising issue is that many TNCs have located some of their manufacturing plants

and industries in the developing countries because of the easy availability of cheap labour. Moreover, as producers, women are exposed to work exploitation. They are paid less and they are easy victims to occupational hazards. As stated earlier the denial of right to representation further aggravates their pain and suffering..

The process of globalization has not achieved the desired results. It has failed to alleviate the poverty amongst women. The technology based policies of globalization have attacked the traditional occupation of women and deprived them of better avenues of employment. Though liberalization of trade has favoured the educated and skilled urban middle class women, it has failed miserably to deliver benefit to uneducated and less educated rural women. In fact, globalization has failed to address the issues of economic sustainability of women. The rising tide of globalization has not lifted all women. As a result, globalization tends to increase income inequalities between different sectors and groups. Women are in the grip of poverty which in turn forces many rural girls to migrate to red light areas of cities and to undertake menial jobs .

Suggestion:

From the above mentioned facts and discussion, it is quite clear that the process of globalization has not affected all women groups in the same way. It has turned out to be a bane for the poor and underprivileged women. By and large, those who are already wealthy, socially and politically privileged are usually

able to get benefit from the economic changes brought about by globalization. Thus, globalization is boon for those who belong to the upper and educated class. But those who are already poor, needy, socially and politically disadvantaged are forced to work in more competitive and unsafe environment without any government support and incentives. Due to globalization, the elimination of public subsidies for health, education and social services has adversely affected the poor women groups. In the same way, growth oriented policies of government have taken away traditional avenues of employment of the rural man and women. To counter the multiple negative impacts of globalization, the state should come forward with effective measures to strengthen delivery system, widen safety networks and focus on rural development. Globalization can bring in the lives of rural and underprivileged women if it is backed and supported by adequate and effective policy measures by the government. Such efforts can bridge the gap between the poor and the rich and thus making globalization a boon for all the women of a country.

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