



Empowerment of Women in India and Cultural Globalization in the Context of Indian Economy

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Abstract:

The subject of empowerment of women has becoming a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. Many agencies of United Nations in their reports have emphasized that gender issue is to be given utmost priority. It is held that women now cannot be asked to wait for any more for equality. Via this article; the researcher wants to convey that the women empowerment in the global context of India & its Economy.

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1. Women Empowerment in India

Inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women have also been age-old issues all over the world. Thus, women's quest for equality with man is a universal phenomenon. What exists for men is demanded by women?

They have demanded equality with men in matters of education, employment, inheritance, marriage, politics and recently in the field of religion also to serve as cleric (in Hinduism and Islam). Women want to have for themselves the same strategies of change which menfolk have had over the centuries such as equal pay for equal work. Their quest for equality has given birth to the formation of many women's associations and launching of movements.

The position and status of women all over the world has risen incredibly in the 20th century. We find that it has been very low in 18th and 19th centuries in India and elsewhere when they were treated like 'objects' that can be bought and sold. For a long time women in India remained within the four walls of their household. Their dependence on menfolk was total.

A long struggle going back over a century has brought women the property rights, voting rights, an equality in civil rights before the law in matters of marriage and employment (in India women had not to struggle for voting rights as we find in other countries).

In addition to the above rights, in India, the customs of purdha (veil system), female infanticide, child marriage, sati system (self-immolation by the women with their husbands), dowry system and the state of permanent widowhood were either totally removed or checked to an appreciable extent after independence through legislative measures.

Two Acts have also been enacted to emancipate women in India. These are: Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and the Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act, 2006. The Domestic Violence Act recognizes that abuse be physical as well as mental. Anything that makes a woman feel inferior and takes away her self-respect is abuse. Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act can be beneficial in preventing the abuse of institution of marriage and hindering social justice especially in relation to women.

It would help the innumerable women in the country who get abandoned by their husbands and have no means of proving their marital status. It would also help check child marriages, bigamy and polygamy, enable women to seek maintenance and custody of their children and widows can claim inheritance rights. The Act is applicable on all women irrespective of caste, creed or religion. It would truly empower Indian women to exercise their rights.

To what extent legislative measures have been able to raise the status of women in India? Are women now feel empowered in the sense that they are being equally treated by men in all spheres of life and are able to express one's true feminine urges and energies? These are the important questions to be investigated with regard to women's empowerment in India. We all know that girls are now doing better at school than boys. The annual results of Secondary and Higher Secondary Board examinations reveal this fact. More women are getting degrees than men, and are filling most new jobs in every field.

There was a time when women's education was not a priority even among the elite. Since the last quarter of the 20th century and more so after the opening up of the economy, post-1991, a growing number of women have been entering into the economic field, seeking paid work (remunerative jobs) outside the family. Women are playing bigger and bigger role in economic field: as workers, consumers, entrepreneurs, managers and investors. According to a report of The Economist, 'Women and the World Economy', in 1950, only one-third of American women of working age had a paid job.

Today, two-thirds do, and women make up almost half of American's workforce. In fact, almost everywhere, including India, more women are employed, though their share is still very low. Manufacturing work, traditionally a male preserve, has declined, while jobs in services have expanded, reducing the demand for manual labour and putting the sexes on equal footing. We can now see women in almost every field: architecture, lawyers, financial services, engineering, medical and IT jobs. They have also entered service occupations such as a nurse, a beautician, a sales worker, a waitress, etc.

They are increasingly and gradually seen marching into domains which were previously reserved for males (police, driver's army, pilots, chartered accountants, commandos). In spite of their increasing number in every field, women still remain perhaps the world's most underutilized resources. Many are still excluded from paid work and many do not make best use of their skills. The rapid pace of economic development has increased the demand for educated female labour force almost in all fields. Women are earning as much as their husbands do, their employment nonetheless adds substantially to family and gives family an economic advantage over the family with only one breadwinner. This new phenomenon has also given economic power in the hands of women for which they were earlier totally dependent on males. Economically independent women feel more confident about their personal lives.

Hence, they are taking more personal decisions, for instance, about their further education, marriage, etc. More and more women want freedom of work and control their own reproduction, freedom of mobility and freedom to define one's own style of life. It is contended that freedom leads to greater openness, generosity and tolerance.

This new pattern of working wives and mothers has affected the status of women in many ways. Women's monetary independence leads them to the way to empowerment. Sociologist Robert Blood (1965) observes, 'Employment emancipates women from domination by their husbands and secondarily, raises their daughters from inferiority to their brothers' (Blood and Wolfe, 1965). In brief, economic independence of women is changing their overall equations, perspective and outlook.

Economic independence of women has also affected the gender relationships. New forms of gender relationships (live-in relationship is challenging the long-rooted conception of marriages as a permanent arrangement between families and communities. In traditional marriages the relationships were hierarchical and authoritarian. The modern conjugal relationships are based on freedom and desire rather than convention. People's attitudes about marriage are also changing. Educated women now feel that there is more to life than marriage. They can get most of the things they want (income, status, identity) without marriage, while they find it harder to find a suitable accomplished mate. This is why their marriage is delayed.

With increasing literacy among women in India, their entry into many types of work, formerly the preserve of men, women can now look upon the bearing and raising of their children not as a life's work in itself but as an episode. If women have started taking men's work, it could be said that men have taken over women's. Young fathers could be seen wash up and making beds, caring of the young and doing many other domestic works. The division of labour between sexes has changed somewhat. They do similar work and share both household activities and tastes. Women wear trousers, jeans, suits and put on ties.

The facts about working wives suggest a basic change in Indian family. The traditional (nuclear) household, in which the husband works and the wife remains at home to care for the children, though still a dominant pattern, is changing gradually but steadily.

A new pattern is emerging in which both partners work outside the home but do not share equally in housework and child care as we see in Western families. In India, the paternalistic attitude of the male has not undergone much change. In spite of such drawbacks and hurdles that still prevail, Indian women (especially educated) are no longer hesitant or apologetic about claiming a share and visibility within the family, at work, in public places, and in the public discourse.

2. Cultural Globalization

Nowadays, there is much talk and discussion about cultural globalization, i.e., a common culture is developing across the globe. To some extent, it is true despite some resistance from national culture, as both are developing side by side. Generally, the word 'culture' is used to mean 'the total way of life' to include economic, political and social norms, values and behaviour.

Globalization is seen as the intermixing of people, cultures, economies and technologies. Modern cultural globalization is a new phenomenon. It started with economic globalization—spread of transnational corporations and global commodities, especially food and drinks items like pizza and coke, and dress material such as Levi jeans, Reebok and Nike shoes, etc. In this way, we are all sharing in a common transnational form of consumption. This developing consumerism has encouraged mass common consumer culture which reflects a powerful grip on societies throughout the world. As consumerism spreads, changes are visible in lifestyles, cultural tastes, food habits, dress patterns and in modes of entertainment also. As an example, gastroenteritis—a disease associated with eating habits—reflects the impact of globalization. The rise of eating disorder, use of more and more fast foods and irregularity in eating have contributed much to the disease of gastric disorder. Neo-Marxist sociologists argue that the process of globalization is not only limited to consumer articles, but it is also accompanied by ideas and more generally ideologies which sustain the consumer culture. Changes even in norms and values are quite striking. Globalization encourages a growing integration and convergence of cultural relations.

The concept of cultural globalization is closely linked with economic globalization. Mike Featherstone (1990) argued that as a result of the development of financial markets, the main actors share many business and lifestyles norms and values.

As an example, he cited that there is a close relationship between leisure activities and work. Other scholars have stressed on the emergence of global patterns of consumption and consumerism, the cultivation of cosmopolitan lifestyles, and the spread of popular culture (e.g., Madonna or Michael Jackson's latest songs) as the basis of the development of cultural globalization. Thus, increased economic linkages led to cultural influences across countries. The key agents of globalization of culture are transnational corporations, cultural and media agencies that go beyond the nation-state.

In spreading cultural globalization, technology has played a crucial role. Technology, in reality, has shrunk the world in our palm. Revolutions in electronic communication (such as radio, TV, cinema, telephone, mobile, fax, Internet, etc.) and rapid means of transportation have produced an indelible impact on local, regional and national cultures because these means can now reach swiftly even the remotest corner of any country. As a result, the world is slowly and slowly becoming as one place. Both the media and geographical mobility feed this perception. Giddens (1997) has called this phenomenon as 'time-space distantiation' meaning separation of time and space brought about by modern communication.

Problems, like floods in Thailand or Indonesia, famine in Ethiopia, tsunami in Japan and events like World Football Competition or Olympics in China or England have a global dimension. Similarly, creations of international economic, political, social and other agencies like UNO, WHO, UNESCO, UNDP, IMF, World Bank, human rights organizations, and the complex interchange between world systems, have contributed to a large extent global cultural homogeneity. Over and above, science and secularization of thought are the main factors in developing the critical and innovative character of the modern outlook and this in turn has helped in spreading cultural globalization. People no longer assume that customs or habits are acceptable merely because they have the age-old authority of tradition.

On the contrary, our ways of life have increasingly based on rationality. In addition to how we think, the content of ideas has also changed. Ideals of self-betterment, freedom, equality and democratic participation are largely creations of the past two or three centuries. Such ideals have served to mobilize the process of globalization of culture. Globalization has affected cultures in two ways: Firstly, it has tried to homogenize the cultures. We can see this in dress pattern such as pant and shirt and to some extent in food recipes—pizza, Chinese noodles, etc. On the other hand, globalization has helped in the resurgence of local culture. This we can observe in the revival of traditional cultures and reforming of the identity.

Cultural globalization is also marked with some new trends in human relations. Recognition of a worldwide ecological crisis, the development of worldwide concern about health problems such as AIDS and other diseases, extension of the concept of human rights and the creation of global democratic movements are a few examples of integration that is taking place between different nation-states.

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