

## Impact of Globalization on the Lives of Women and Women's Struggle in India

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### Abstract

*This paper assesses the adverse affects of globalization within the economical, domestic, political and cultural domain in the lives of Indian women. It scrutinizes the implications of liberalization within decentralized and formal sector, consumer- expenditure patterns, commodity and goods market and commercial advertizing. It highlights the plight of rural and tribal women in the wake of new economic policies leading to illiteracy, poverty, unjust wages, violence, health hazards, domestic labor and debasement of women. It brings to light how the government fails in devising a gender sensitive advancement program. The paper also discusses how the commercial advertizing weaves the myth of the new Indian women based on a distortion of actual women's exploitation under globalization while concurrently and congruently strengthening culturally stereotypical notions of gender. It stresses on how globalization has strengthened existing patriarchies and spawned neo forms of oppression ultimately setting up new challenges for feminist struggle in India.*

**Key Words:** Globalization, Women, Expenditure, Labor, Oppression, Gender, Liberalization and Exploitation.

Impact of Globalization on the Lives of Women and Women's Struggle in India Advocates of globalization in India argue in its favor based on rhetoric of development, booming consumerism and expenditure, burgeoning commodity market and increasing standard of living for both men and women. However, feminist scholars and activists have had their discomfort with such an assessment, premised upon a value-free conception of 'development' and arbitrary notions of 'improvement'.

In reality, globalization has proved disastrous to the economic subsistence of Indian women, has led to their marginalization within the domestic political process and has culturally reinstated a stereotypically gendered identity. It has strengthened existing patriarchies and created newer forms of oppression thus setting up new push backs for the women's struggle.

Since globalization begun in India the government has made significant changes in its economic and trade policies in order to facilitate foreign investment and free flow of foreign corporations in Indian markets. All this led to an exploitation and relegation of women to the unpaid labor sector. Women are employed in hazardous conditions, paid lower wages than men, retrenched and face instability of employment. Neither there are any political representative bodies in order to negotiate for just wages and better working conditions for these women. (Chhiber, 2009 & Patel, 2007) Moreover, the coerced transfer of natural resources from the poor into the hands of multinational conglomerates, environment and forest damage and production of exportable non-food crops in lieu of subsistence food crops has had a precarious effect on the livelihood of millions of rural and tribal women.

The changing of Indian markets into export oriented zones has adversely affected the domestic self-sufficiency of these poor women who now need to walk long distances and toil hard in order to procure cheap food articles for their family as getting food is becoming increasingly difficult. All this has shattered the livelihood of multitudes of Indian women to pieces and has set a blow to the feminist project in India (Sangari & Chakravarti, 1999). Within the entire scenario the role of the state is also deeply disturbing as it retreats from social responsibilities and join hands with global forces that ride on the backs of millions for their own profits.

Trapped in the net of national debts and dependency, the government came up with a State Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1990, which included slashing down on food and fertilizer subsidies, closing down of public distribution services, reduction in public investment, increase in bank rates and insurance charges and reducing budgets for social sector.

The SAP policies favor denationalization, devaluation and deregulation in order to support a capital intensive high-tech production and import intensive growth. The state also revoked statutory protection and social security for workers. The increase in inflation due to these policies and reduction in paid jobs diminishes the expenditure power of households (Patel, 2007). Faced with acute poverty, hunger and unemployment women are then forced into the low-wage private sector jobs and prostitution. Girl-child labor, illiteracy and violence against women also increased significantly in the wake of the SAP. (Sangari & Chakravarti, 1999)

Multinationals identify women workers as ideal to serve inequitable demands within a global division of labor as they constitute an easier and cheaper substitute to male labor force (Chhiber, 2009 & Patel, 2007). In fact, one of the chief strategies for multinationals to reduce wage bills and maximize their profits is to shift their production processes to the third world countries such as China, Thailand, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Africa and Indonesia due to availability of flexible female labor at extremely low rates (Patel, 2007). The relationship between the formal sector and the decentralized sector is one of dependency. The government itself provides incentives to corporate houses to shut big city firms and establish ancillary units of production where women and girl-child are employed at piece rate basis in place of comparatively expensive male labor. The mythical discourse about 'nimble hands' is then weaved on top of it to legitimize such unethical practices. Women are expected to perform unquestioningly repetitive, laborious and menial tasks and are robbed of any possibility of upward mobility because of the temporary nature of jobs. (Patel, 2007)

One of the explanations offered by economists for this disparity in the type of work and wages between men and women is that women lack the prerequisites such as education, skills, experience and capital which mark them as inferior to men within the waged work sector. Women and men 'rationally' decide as a family who will undertake what responsibilities of the household and women choose to perform domestic chores. As a result caught up in acts of cleaning, washing, procuring food, cooking and taking care of children, women are left with less time and energy to gain significant experience to compete with men within the employment sector. But to deem that women rationally choose to perform household duties upon exercise of individual volition is to turn a blind eye to intra-household power structures and gender division of labor since this choice is most often motivated by an already existing value system of a gender biased and patriarchal society (Banerjee, p. 323). This phenomenon also initiates a process of reciprocity wherein firstly, women are paid less than men due to their lack of experience because they have additional household responsibilities to attend to. Secondly, by using this as an excuse for keeping intact the vulnerability of women workers it is ensured that her status in the family remains that of a 'supplementary earner'. Women continue to engage in domestic chores and remain inexperienced and hence always remain trapped and relegated to the lower-paid cheap labor jobs. This eventually seals the fate of most women who can never escape this vicious circle in order to come at par with men and enjoy equal rights and wages. Thus as Sangari and Vaid have rightly argued in their essay, '*Recasting of Women*', symbolic constructs, traditions, value systems and ideas intrude upon the labor process in multifarious ways from causational to legitimizing (Sangari & Vaid, 1990).

To believe that this is true only of the lower income enterprises and small firms that face competition from local opponents and thus have little incentive to change, as Marcelo Guigale postulates in his article 'Globalization: Has it Helped or Hurt Women?' (2011), is a mistaken notion. Since indeed it is true that liberalization in India has led to considerable increase in women's employment in the banking sector yet the prevalent gender biases at work place and the restraints on women's physical mobility combined with other factors impose severe challenges to the possibility of growth for women and gender equity within the finance sector (Bezbaruah, 2015).

Table 30 published as part of the Monster Index Salary Report 2014 by employment website Monster, reveals a significant disparity in incomes between male and female workers employed in the finance sector in India. In fact according to the findings of the report women are paid less than their male colleagues across sectors such as Information Technology, Financial Services, Manufacturing and Banking. The average wage per hour for a male worker in IT sector was recorded to be Rs.359.25 while for women workers it was only Rs.254.04 amounting to a gap of staggering 29%.

According to another survey of 1,675 women managers, 56% admitted that they had been disadvantaged in workplace because of their gender. In another survey, 68% of corporate executives agreed that they preferred a male boss because they feel women approach work with more emotions than men and women's divided attention due to motherhood factor. Other studies have shown that women have to work harder, are paid less than men and continue to face gendered barriers to career progression.

According to most women the cause behind these career constraints is domestic responsibilities, gender stereotypes that lead to reluctance in recruiting women, gender segregation and exclusion from informal networks in highly male dominated surroundings (Bezbaruah, 2015). The educated upper class woman carries twin responsibilities over her shoulders that of work as well as family and children. Thus the upper class woman may have benefitted from globalization insofar as her position has become relatively better than women belonging to the lower classes. However, even her position is subsumed and appropriated within a larger patriarchal order.

Historically, the Indian economy was a land based economy and was largely a patriarchal one (Banerjee, p. 329). Thus as Mitchel Barret has also emphasized that though the ideology of gender cannot be claimed as an inevitable functional requisite for capitalism but once such an ideology is historically embedded then it may become essential for the maintenance of the system. The way capitalism has been organized in its present form, the sexual division of labor plays a crucial role in relations of production. (Barret, pp. 168-169) Thus placed within the nexus of patriarchal and capitalist order women undergo double exploitation. Within the domestic domain, the private patriarch seeks to maximize his profits by employing women's participation in economic activities outside the home (Banerjee, p.330) but only as long as it does not challenge the existing male-authority, power-structures and gender ideology and the women adheres to a strict code of sexual propriety. On the the other hand, apart from providing cheap labor, the home once again becomes the institution where women's labor provides buffer against the 'depredations of the market' (Sangari & Chakravarti, 1999).

The tenets of women's movement have for the longest period emphasized upon a need to address this sexual division of labor and the way family structures have been organized. The responsibility of managing home and raising children should not be solely vested with the mother. Rather efforts should be directed toward a sharing of duties between both the parents. There has been a recurrent demand for better child-care centers, eating facilities, providing insurance cover to women, labor laws ensuring safe working environment for women and better pay and rapid transportation modes (Patel, 2007).

The United Nations has advocated for 'mainstreaming gender' in growth and development policies and programs so that both men and women can equally enjoy the benefits of development (Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview, 2002). Recently there have been attempts by the Indian State at 'gender sensitivity' and the National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001 is one such. Women's rights groups are given a share in policy making and airing their concerns and opinions. However, mainstreaming gender under this agenda cannot be a feminist goal as there is a deeper problematic with such an approach. According to the NPEW 2001, globalization presents a challenge to realization of gender equality only because benefits of development have been unequally distributed. There is much talk of gender equality without ever addressing the gender division of labor or the ecologically unsustainable development process that the government has undertaken. By making women's right groups stakeholders in the policy making process as catalysts, participants and recipients the government seeks to use women's specific skills and experience gained by virtue of their position in a patriarchal society precisely due to a sexual division of labor to regulate development. Thus rather than problematize gender inequality the process serves to strengthen patriarchy and make development programs successful. The state manipulates opposition and silences dissent by making feminist activists, scholars and intellectuals stakeholders in state policies and decision making machinery (Menon, 2009).

The rising incomes in general for all, men and women, is deemed as one of the redeeming features of globalization. People in general are becoming richer. Hence there is more to spend and as a corollary the standards of living for all have increased (Guigale, 2011). At this point, two questions become pertinent. What is the actual percentage of people for whom the standards of living have increased significantly? The second and the more important question from a feminist framework is what stakes do women hold within the household in this increased capacity for expenditure? The common perception is that since the woman is the one who buys groceries and other household articles thus an increased capacity of consumerism and expenditure would directly benefit her (Guigale, 2011).

However such logic is hard to hold true within the Indian situation. Prem Chowdhary's essay *'Ideology, Culture and Hierarchy: Expenditure- Consumption Patterns in Rural Households'* investigates the expenditure-consumption patterns in the rural households of Haryana as emerged in the wake of green and white revolution. It highlights how expenditure and consumption is based solely on male will and opinion. Women's voices are insignificant or absent within this pattern extending from expenditure on food, fuel, housing, clothing to even expenditure on festivals, marriages and family occasions.

They remain deprived in terms of social status, health, food, nutrition and hygiene. Even women working as agricultural laborers do not have control over their incomes except for households that are solely headed by women. The burden of labor intensive husbandry and agriculture also falls upon the woman yet she is marginalized in terms of consumption and proceeds of sale of the produce as was even the case under the Milk Revolution in India. These patterns were not just limited to villages in Haryana and Rajasthan but emerged as an 'all-India' phenomenon. (Chowdhry, 1999). Also within the Indian context the caste factor too plays a crucial role in the suppression of women. With increase in incomes for scheduled caste or scheduled tribe families women are subjected to fiercer mobility constraints and are required to reorganize the domestic space as part of emulation of the upper class and caste households. (Bezbaruah, 2015)

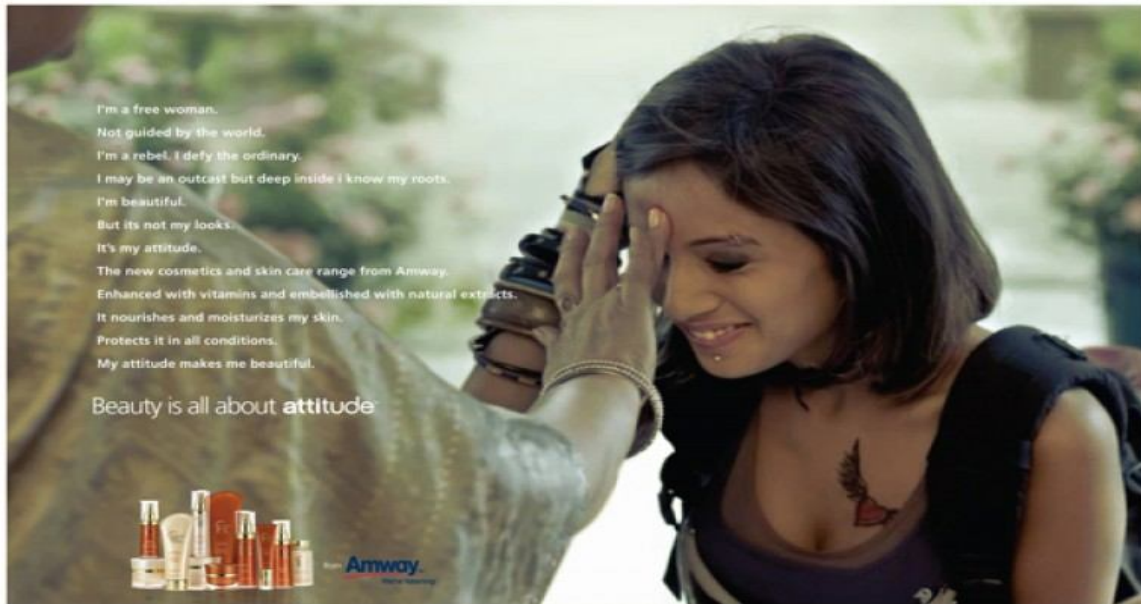
On another level globalization has enforced new relations between pleasure, consumption and culturally specific ideals of femininity. On the one hand, Trans-nationals are irresponsibly flooding the market with harmful reproductive devices and healthcare products without as much caring to invest in research for safer products (Sangari & Chakravarti, 1999). It has also come to light that recently multinationals have dumped potentially harmful products in the third world consumer markets which have otherwise been banned or restricted in developed and advanced nations (Chhiber, 2009). On the other hand, they are making hefty investments in the burgeoning beauty and cosmetics industry which specifically focuses on women's appearance and reinstates stereotypical gender roles and model of an 'ideal' woman. The market overflows with these products creating an image of vibrancy whose savoring consumer is especially the woman. This sense of enjoyment of good life glosses over the actual devaluation of women and exploitation of poor. Wrapped in aspiration, it creates a vicarious sense of enjoyment even for those who cannot actually buy these products (Sangari and Chakravarti, 1999).

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan speaks about the significance of representation of women in advertizing and the importance of a 'semiotic critique' of the sign, here specifically the ideal Indian woman, to the feminist project in India. If one concedes to the fact that 'femaleness' is constructed motivated by the dominant ideological structures like colonialism or capitalism then by an alertness to this representation and the terms of its signification one can dismantle the politics of control and desire invested in its construction. (Rajan, 1993) The commercial advertizing hails the ideal 'new Indian woman' image; a woman who is both modern and traditional at the same time. She is Indian in the sense of possessing a pan-Indian identity overriding all regional, class, and cultural, communal and linguistic disparities. She is liberated yet deeply rooted in Indian values and belief system and is not 'westernized'. The image magically reconciles all existential conflicts of identity that Indian woman experience as a part of their lived reality by projecting a perfect blend of traditional and modern subjectivities. It plays on the image of the urban educated middle class Indian woman. She is ambitious in her career and also dedicated to her family. The commercial advertisement sector both through print and television becomes a medium for the interpellation of female users as this 'new woman' whose chief characteristics are that she is hygienic, attractive, educated, confident, diligent, socially aware and most importantly an informed consumer- one who deliberates and exercises conscious choice as a user. By representing the consumers of these products as the ideal woman, the advertisements first create a desired self-image by all women which is then further naturalized. It demonstrates the politics of representation as a means of coerced 'self-representation' based on an investment of desire. It concurrently provides a normative model of citizenship which is significantly now a gendered female. (Rajan, 1993)

But this image of the new woman is appropriated in ways that render it 'safe' against prevailing social fears. The most prominent fear is that of uncontrolled sexuality. There is a sharp polarization of representation between the images of young and older woman. The younger is the rebellion who may even project sexual desire while the older is the self-sacrificing one who does all and thinks all for her family. She even dedicates her income to the expenditure for the well-being of her family. However, both the images, that of rebellion and of financial autonomy are salvaged through a certain tinge of femininity that is encapsulated in a physical charm. The younger woman's rebellion/sexuality will also be naturally tamed after entering into a marriage and hence her freedom preceding it, is sanctioned as a safe space. In this way, this dichotomy deconstructs itself into continuity. (Rajan, 1993) The advertisement for Amway India range of products, the Indian unit of an American based beauty and healthcare product brand perfectly illustrates this politics of representation. A young and 'modern' bob cut girl with multiple tattoos and piercings, sporting a gothic look accompanies a more plain 'kurta' clad 'Indian' friend to her home. The Indian friend has her family waiting at the door to welcome her home with the elderly grandmother holding a plate with the customary lamp, rice grain and red vermilion.

As the daughter, hesitatingly introduces her 'modern' friend to her family, the grandmother exchanges apprehensive looks with other members of the family. The question is - Should she apply the auspicious red vermilion '*tilak*' or dot on the head of this 'rebellious' teenager? Just then the 'modern' girl, sensing the tense atmosphere, bows down her head to allow the elderly woman to apply the dot on her forehead thus demonstrating her respect for the traditional Indian values.

These words are then spoken in the background "We know how to exercise our freedom and will but we also know how to respect others' wishes". Here, the 'other' specifically signifying the bearers of patriarchal authority- parents, religious authorities and moral custodians of the society. The tag line then appears- Beauty is all about attitude. The potential rebel is at once tamed by a subtle bowing of the head signifying a submission to tradition and customs and co-optation within patriarchy. The dichotomy between the categories of modernity and tradition comes together at once and collapses into this image of the 'modern Indian woman'.



(Sharma, nd)

The image of the 'new woman' can be conceptualized as what Barthes has called a 'myth'. The woman by default is always educated, attractive, liberated, independent, and hardworking. She has respect for family as an institution. Her capability to buy a product of her choice or rather her choice to buy a product of this brand translates into what identity she chooses for herself which is in this case precisely that of the 'new woman' who has emerged in response to the ethos of the contemporary times. This image of the new woman becomes a speech which communicates her liberty, economic autonomy, power to command her life on her own terms, volition, empowerment and modernity- a self-evident statement of her ameliorated social status and happier life. The 'myth' or the 'second order semiological system' here signifies the improved status of women and their empowerment as a result of benevolent capitalism. This image is based on a distortion of history and gross glamorization of reality. In actuality there has been a devaluing of women's labor, increased violence, making precarious the prosperity of millions of women, impoverishment, illiteracy, coerced transfer of land and resources, lack of nourishment and deterioration of health, a robbing of sustainable resources, increasingly rigid notions of gender identities, the curtailing of purchasing power of majority of population and the debasement of women's position within global economy.

This seemingly innocent and depoliticized speech then serves as an ideology of naturalization as this image of the 'new Indian woman' is projected as the desired self-image for all women. The aspect of liberation is split from contemporary women's movement: by envisaging liberation as a matter of individual women's accomplishment and choice. Commercial advertizing specifically targets those aspects of women's liberation that the women's movement has marked out for itself like work, marriage, sexuality and family. This co-optation by commercial advertizing works as every co-optation does: as a form of 'sharing in the spoils as well as displacement'. Therefore superficially it carries an appearance of supporting the goals of feminist struggle but on a deeper level it undercuts them by offering a similar desired image of empowered woman achieved by an alternate trajectory (Rajan, 1993).

Rajan also emphasizes upon the space for resistance that construction of an image offers and the ‘liberatory’ power it accords to women. For what has been casted in a particular way can be deconstructed and recast into another model. If the image of a woman has been made in a certain way then it can be unmade and made differently. But resistance is not simply a product of feminist assertion and politically desirable feminist intervention. It is rather a matter of articulation of complex, contesting and disparate determining practices so that a theory of resistance can emerge from within ideology. Thus the necessary second step is to come up with feminism’s counter history. It is imperative to engage with narrations that register though limited nevertheless aspects and incidents of subversion as part of a radical discourse. (Rajan, 130)

Thus globalization is widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Amidst all this women in general emerge as a marginalized group. The situation is particularly grim in case of third world countries where women are seen as a repository of cheap and flexible labor to cater to the needs of international division of labor. They face exploitation and subjugation in the decentralized sector and are forced to work in hazardous conditions. The state also commits itself to favor the interests of global forces and enacts policies that further aggravate the situation causing poverty, crimes, illiteracy, child labor and labor exploitation. At the same time women are doubly abused within the confines of the household as they carry the twin burden of domestic and economic labor. They face a continued marginalization in terms of consumption and expenditure patterns and are themselves treated as commodities within the consumer markets. Globalization has also reinstated stereotypical gender ideologies leading to a strengthening of existing patriarchies and creation of new modes of subjugation and control. It has simultaneously, by means of politics of representation, strengthened the rhetoric of gendering and perpetrated the myth of the good life of the ‘new Indian woman’. The women in India need to battle multiple forms of oppression, limited not just to questions of class but also to questions of caste, religion, region and tribal origins. This multilateral exploitation of women is therefore one of the major challenges that feminist struggle in India need to confront in its pursuit of equality for women.

Gender pay gap in the Finance sector is 19%, which is a lower figure than the average in the Indian economy. However, other women disparities are prevalent in the Finance sector.

**TABLE 30 – SUPERVISORY POSITION PER GENDER**

HAS A SUPERVISORY POSITION						
GENDER	%	MEDIAN GROSS HOURLY WAGE	PERCENTAGE OF SAMPLE		MEDIAN GROSS HOURLY WAGE	
			NO	YES	NO	YES
MALE	87%	306.0	51%	49%	242.5	401.6
FEMALE	13%	248.3	61%	39%	200.2	362.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>291.0</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>230.9</b>	<b>392.6</b>

Source: WageIndicator Foundation

**TABLE 31 – TENURE GROUPS PER GENDER**

GENDER	SHARE				MEDIAN GROSS HOURLY WAGE			
	0-2	3-5	6-10	11+	0-2	3-5	6-10	11+
MALE	15%	28%	40%	17%	142.5	211.7	369.5	548.5
FEMALE	22%	33%	32%	13%	115.5	189.9	334.6	461.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>138.6</b>	<b>207.1</b>	<b>362.5</b>	<b>530.2</b>

Source: WageIndicator Foundation

Table 30: Monster Salary Index India Report 2014

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