



## **EFFECT OF GLOBALISATION ON WOMEN WORKERS**

**: AT A GALANCE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Globalisation affects different groups of women in different spaces in different ways. On the one hand it may generate fresh opportunities for women to be forerunners in economic and social development. With the beginning of global communication networks and cross-cultural exchange there seems to be a transform in the status of women albeit not to a very big extent. However, globalisation has indeed promoted thoughts and norms of equality for women that have brought about a consciousness and acted as a catalyst in their resist for reasonable rights and opportunities. On the other hand it may exacerbate gender inequality in a patriarchal culture, especially in the developing globe. In the economic dominion it may direct to further marginalisation of women in the informal labour division or impoverishment through loss of conventional sources of income.

Keywords: Decades, Ideas, Profit, Developing, Employment.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Within the past two decades, globalization has created a tremendous impact on the lives of women in developing nations. Globalization can be defined as “a complex economic, political, cultural, and geographic process in which the mobility of capital, organizations, ideas, discourses, and people has taken a global or transnational form. With the establishment of international free trade policies, such as North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and GATT, transnational corporations are using the profit motive to guide their factories towards developing nations in search of “cheap” female labour. Corporations prefer female labour over male labour because women are considered to be “docile” workers, who are willing to obey production demands at any price. In developing nations like India certain type of work, such as garment assembly and lace making is considered to be an extension of female household roles. Therefore, cultural influences in India also impact employment stratification. Bringing a high demand of employment opportunities for women in India creates an instantaneous change within the social structure. Although the demand for female employment brings about an array of opportunities and a sense of independence, the glass ceiling continues to exist with the “feminization of poverty”. 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 and negative impacts of it on the position of women in India at present.

### **EFFECT OF GLOBALIZATION ON WOMEN IN INDIA**

The positive effect of globalization is that it has opened up broader communication lines and attracted more companies as well as different organizations into India. This provides opportunities for not only working men, 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 treatment towards women to afford them an equal stance in society. Despite the positive effects of globalization through increased employment opportunities for women, globalization has a darker, more sinister side. Out of the total 397 million workers in India, 123.9 million are women and of these women 96% of them workers are in the unorganized sector. Accordingly, although more women are now seeking paid employment, a vast majority of them obtains only poorly paid unskilled jobs in the informal sector, without any job security or social security. 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. Thus it would appear, that globalization has made many international corporations richer by the billions at the expense of women who are suffering enormously due to this expansion of corporate empires.

### **HEALTH HAZARDS FACED BY WORKING WOMEN WORKING IN INDIA IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION**

One of the common hazards faced by the working class in the era of globalization is the increasing threat to job security, which in turn negatively impacts the health of female workers. Among the workers in the informal sector a large number of them are women, who have no job security. They are often unskilled workers who receive low wages. Availability of work is irregular; and when work is available, women must work long hours. 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.

Unemployment, underemployment and temporary work are more common among women than among men. This subset of workers do not have any social security or health care benefits. As a result, the work-related illnesses, which they suffer from, remain hidden. Furthermore, long-term unemployment constitutes a serious risk for the worker's emotional stability, because it leads to poverty and deteriorates self-image and self-esteem.

## **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. The improper and insufficient dietary intake along with the heavy workload results in nutritional disorders. 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 HARRASSMENT AT THE WORKPLACE**

One of the evils of the modern society is the sexual harassment that the female workers endure from their male counterparts and other members of the society. Regardless of whether they are skilled or unskilled labourers or work in the organized or unorganized sector, a large number of women are harassed sexually at the workplace. In 1997, the Supreme Court, in the Visakha case, instituted a set of guidelines to ensure the prevention of sexual harassment and to protect women. Even the Supreme Court's guidelines on instituting complaint committees, amending standing orders, and educating workers about sexual harassment have not been implemented in most workplaces.

## **NIGHT WORK**

For years women have been working in hospitals, in the telecom department, IT and TT enabled services and in the fish processing industry during the night shift. In the era of globalization, the number of women working in the night shift is increasing with call centers and export oriented companies located in the Export Processing Zone employing women in large numbers during the night shift, without providing proper protection or transport facilities to them.

The Factories Act, 1948 is a comprehensive legislation drafted incorporating various protective provisions that provide just and humane conditions for the workers. The Factories Act was also a landmark piece of legislation, as it theoretically should have provided sufficient protection to women workers as the legislative intent was to enact laws that protected women from harassment and exploitation at the workplace. For example, section 66 of the Factories Act expressly prohibits employment of women in night shifts. Although, section 66 contains a saving clause under which state governments have been given powers to vary the limits on night shifts, such variation shall not authorize the employment of women between the hours of 10 pm and 5pm. However, in Triveni K.S and others v. Union of India, 'the Constitutionality of section 66(1) clause (b) was challenged as being discriminatory on the basis of sex. Consequently section 66(1)(b) of the Act was struck down as unconstitutional by the Andhra Pradesh High Court.

Under section 66(2) of the Factories Act, 1948 the State Government has been authorized to make rules providing for exemption from restriction of working women in fish-curing or fish canning factories

where employment of women beyond the permissible hours of work is necessary to prevent damage to or deterioration of any raw material. Yet in, Smt. R. Vasantha V. Union of India, the Madras High Court has struck down section 66(1)(b) of Factories Act, 1948 as unconstitutional which prohibit the employment of women in night shift. In this case, in upholding the contention of the women's forums, that women should also be permitted to work during the night shift, the court had issued elaborate guidelines in furtherance of the Vishaka's directives to be followed by the employers when women are permitted to work during night time. In the elaborate guidelines the court has extended the protection to women workers and transportation is one of the main aspects among the guidelines. It makes mandatory on the part of the employer to provide separate transportation facility to them. The federal government is now proposing to amend this section 66 of the Factories Act to permit employment of women in night shifts. The proposed amendment attempts to generalize, legitimize and even makes women employment in night shifts mandatory. It is pertinent to mention that the working hours of the women employees in service industry, especially modern industries like Information Technology enabled services and Business Processing Outsource services, like call centers are not well defined under the existing labor laws. Therefore they employ a large number of women in night shifts. However the proposed amendments pertain only to the Factories Act, 1948 which covers the manufacturing industry only.

Moreover even though night work will help to usher gender-parity in the work force, the apprehensions about incidents of sexual abuse are a matter of concern. The case of Pratibha Srikant, which involved the brutal rape and murder of a woman who was working in the multinational company HP in Bangalore, on December 13, 2005 highlights the serious hazard that women working in the night shifts face. The Supreme Court in this case has dismissed the plea of Som Mittal, former Managing Director of Hewlett Packard, to quash the First Information Report against him. The Supreme Court in allowing prosecution against Som Mittal stated that it is the company that is responsible for the safety of women working under them, and when there is a ban by the government on night shifts in Karnataka, Som Mittal was liable for flouting all rules and regulations. In short, Som Mittal was vicariously liable as the head of the company as it employed women workers during night shifts in direct violation of the local laws banning night shifts. In the present global scenario women have entered all field despite various societal pressures. Thus with regard to night works, though there are guidelines provided by the highest court of the country, it is essential to ensure if the guidelines are carried out in reality. Further, it would be highly appreciable if steps are taken to curb the activities that may lead to harassment and also steps should be taken to ensure, that in each and every establishment women are safe and secure. From the above observations, it is evident that the harassment of women is a major social problem with the wide spread entry of women into the labor force. Sexual harassment is a multidimensional phenomenon that needs to be studied from multidisciplinary perspectives. No doubt, the aspects of globalization have provided women with greater opportunities to work but however, it has also led to gender wise differentials and the marginalization of women which is clearly reflected through segregation of women workers in certain specific jobs. Unfavorable working hours, lack of training and skill up-gradation opportunities and lesser career mobility in the formal sector of economy still prevail in almost every country. Therefore, a



new vision for the future is required and we need to create an alternative society based on gender justice, ecological sustainability and local global democracy.

At this juncture, societies need to see women as dynamic promoters of social transformation, and have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment towards contributing to economic development. Though umpteen steps are taken in this direction like invoking equality and equity, discouraging discrimination, and lengthy legislations, the picture is still disheartening and remains only in the talk. Thus creation of an environment that imparts equal status to women in family, society and the country as well is highly vital at this moment.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The concept of Globalization has got its severe impact on all categories of the society but it is a bit more on the women who are working. Though, globalization increases the opportunities of the working class in bringing social and economic equality between the men and women, it has also got its own negative impact on the working women in a country like India. It provides no permanent income to the women, there is no job security and moreover they are under stress as it finally reflects on their family. Thus, the institution of family is severely disturbed. Often the working women are harassed sexually at the work place and sometimes it is severe when they have to work on night shifts. As they have to balance between their domestic and professional responsibilities, they are under pressure as it finally leads them to severe diseases. It is also said to be a cause for the desertion and divorce. This is how the word globalization influences the women in India.



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7. Pratibha case takes a new turn, The Hindu, Feb. 22, 2008 pg 13 available at: <http://www.hindu.com/2008/02/22/stories/2008022258760300.htm>(link is external).
8. The First Information Report (FIR) is the first step towards filing of a case against any person. Once a FIR is filed, it cannot be withdrawn and the case further proceeds in the respective court.