New ways of life for women in the era of discontinuity, individual identity and cultural globalization

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Abstract

Most of the changes brought by globalization have a mixed impact on women. Opportunities for women on political, economic and socio-cultural fronts have increased manifold unlike the past where they were relegated to mundane house-hold affairs and unimportant tasks. Globalization has also unshackled the prejudices and social mores to a large extent. In addition, joint families have broken down to nuclear and women continue to voice equally as they are better educated. Realizing the importance of good education, even the poor are giving equal importance to both the genders in terms of their education and sharing property. Today they are contributing productively to the countries’ GDP and able to compete with men and even surpass them in several fields.

Developments in transportation and communication technologies have created irreversible process of change in the society which shrunk the world and many are in dilemma of coping with rapid changes in work place as well as social spheres. These developments continue to fuel for increased globalization but also increase challenges especially for women. Despite benefits of globalization, challenges women face include, dual role of sharing huge responsibilities of family and work related issues, lack of adequate attention for the children’s bringing up, running for economic contribution to lead normal life as the value of money continues to fall drastically, night-shift employment, unequal pay especially in unorganized sector etc.

Despite odds of globalization, benefits weigh more and to reap maximum benefits from increasing globalization, appropriate policies must be created as the stage for competition is world and no longer local, regional or national boundaries matter. Managing discontinuity is a key issue not only to survive but also to excel in the age of increasing globalization with rapid changes.

Key Words: Globalization, Women, Change, Opportunities, Economic Freedom

I. Introduction

Globalization is a multi-dimensional process of economic, political, cultural, and ideological change. It has had a mixed impact on women with rapid changes in many parts of the world and India in particular (unesco.org.).

Globalization has opened vast opportunity for the development of women in particular. Prior to 1991 economic reforms, many women had very few opportunities to move out either for education or work (Preeti Singh, ). Today they are contributing productively to the countries’ GDP and able to compete with men and even surpass them in several fields. Change

Globalization coupled with advancement in transportation and communication technologies have created irreversible process of change in the society all over the world. Globalization may be defined as the exchange of products, goods, services, technology, capital and to a certain extent, labour across member countries of World Trade Organization (WTO) which shrunk the world. Unlike in the past, the pace of change is so rapid that many are not able to cope with even to remain where they are.
Many people often confront with a concept called ‘future shock’. It means that people cannot adapt to rapid changes where old concept/product is being adapted, newer changes are already in place and are being followed by innovators and higher middle class income group in particular. Japanese call a concept called ‘kaizen’, which means ‘change for the better’. In fact change is the way of life. In this process of change, nothing can remain in the hands of few and very few even make an attempt to control something as there is value for something everywhere. Now the world is the market, whereas in the past local village, or small area.

In fact, cultural changes are very rapid and cannot be quantified compared with economic reforms and the impact of globalization. Particularly, cultural changes have created indelible imprints on the minds of elderly population and the youth continue to adapt to the abrupt changes and deal with disruptive innovations that are taking place often (Cerny, 1997).

The impact of globalization is mixed (Mosley & Uno, 2007). For those who are skilled, it is an opportunity, both in terms of employment and business. For the rest, lives have bettered as there are strong linkages with the global community to share with in times of need (Lall, 2004).

In order to realise this economic potential of women’s contribution, organisations must gradually embrace a cultural change that will make the working environment an attractive proposition to the pool of female talent (The Voice, 2014).

II. Historical Backdrop:

Women had been subjected to follow the social hierarchy, particularly in the family setting, for the physical and social oppression of women. Status quo was maintained by family heads; generally the eldest member and women in particular had to have ideals emphasized morality, modest character, social relationship (Hayford, 1985). Still many women especially in Middle-East countries continue to have limited public activities due to patriarchal family structures.

Social structures rooted through historical cultural systems that continue to evolve had severe impact on the economic participation of women and their contribution in the economic life. Changes through culture far outweigh the economic globalization, its measurement economically is vague and therefore, it continues to downplay (Guiso, Luigi, Paola Sapienza, and Luigi Zingales, 2006). In the past culture did not involve nor allowed democratic participation unlike in the present era where everyone matters and everyone can be heard as long as an idea/concept is worthy.

Information and communication technologies, coupled with advancement in the transportation systems significantly contributed to the universalization of cultures. Culture does not require any approvals except usage of internet worldwide and this medium allows the whole world to exchange of ideas and culture. This has enormous impact on the cultural shift and value among the internet users. Traditional societies are facing erosion of their cultural rigidities as more and more number of people are consuming western (modern) culture with host of benefits such as economic freedom, participate in the family productivity, and assuming equality roles along with men. Along with individual cultural shift, social systems are changing because of technological marvels and continue to affect the societies worldwide.

III. Opportunities:

Globalization has opened many opportunities and challenges in various spheres of women’s life. Women unshackled many barriers and prejudices built over many centuries (Moghadam, 2000). They not only represent every walk of life but also continue to challenge men in economic activities. The following are the major changes brought by globalization in women. However, the opportunities occurring for women on account of liberalization and globalization continue to be of low standard compared to the well developed countries (Kabeer, 2004).
a) Political Freedom:
Active participation and representation of women continues to increase as economies increasingly globalize. Today their participation in active politics and policy making process has been gaining momentum. In fact, very prominent leader late Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi had an impact in the society to let women free and take part actively in economic and other activities (Richter, 1990). Other women who continue to influence policy making in the country today that include several women chief ministers – Ms. Jayalalitha, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, Ms. Shiela Dixit, Ms. Mayawathi, etc. many have been serving in vital economic and social activities of the emerging economies today.

Various forms of identity politics and the have been emerging which are the paradoxical outgrowth of globalization. Women have huge advantage of taking opportunities of globalization of economies and leading an independent economic life. This independence is the key to shift in culture as women become independent. It leads to free from strong clutches of family bindings, relations, exploration of passion individually, marriages etc. Though traditional societies call it an immoral and imbalanced development, it continues to get support from most women across the world as it offers significantly higher opportunities that one can forgo by following the old cultures of rigidity.

b) Economic Freedom:
Economic globalization led production centres to shift to developing and emerging economies for reaping the cost benefits opened many vistas of opportunities of not only doing business but also in employment opportunities for women. This shift not only opened the vistas of economic freedom but also other rights such as family structures, cultural outlook and overall orientation. Globalization had also resulted in steady rise of non-standard mid-career employment opportunities in many economies (Hofmeister, Blossfeld& Mills, 2006).

Contrary to economic benefits of globalization, uneven distribution of economic wealth as a result of globalization continues to be a contentious issue not only in poor countries but also in the advanced nations (Meyer, 2003 and Ganguly Scrase& Scrase, 2001). This requires political remedy to minimize the gaps between the levels of economic disparity to peaceful coexistence of all people in the world (Parreñas, 2001).

In the coming decades more women are likely to enter the global labour force but their economic potential is largely unrealised. According to a report by Booz & Company, a consultancy, if female employment rates matched those of men, GDP would increase by 5% in America and 9% in Japan by 2020. The impact would be even more significant for developing countries, which are home to most of the world’s women who do not have adequate education and lack social and political. Increasing female employment would increase GDP significantly in countries like India and Egypt, where female labour-participation rates are below 30%. These countries rank low in Booz’s index of women’s economic empowerment (economist.com, 2012).

Flexibility in working hours is the key reason women cite for not working, prioritizing the family. This needs to be supported by organizations and active support through legislations and society in general to flexible work hours for women.

Benefits of economic empowerment – There are numerous benefits of women’s participation in the employment. When more women work and the ratio between the men and women equals, organizational productivity increases -results in faster economic growth. In addition, increasing women and girls’ education contributes to higher economic growth as it leads women to educate their children. Child mortality, other women related issues will significantly improve when there is an equality in all aspects between men and women.
c) Socio-cultural Freedom:
Economic necessities coupled with growing aspirations of people to have better standard of living led women come out of traditional roles into the production and distribution of goods and services. Economic benefits of globalization can be realized only when people are skilled. Therefore, realizing this, governments as well as people on their own are aiming for better education. Today, India is well known for its good English language skills that made our country more mobile compared with many others.

Cultural changes brought by globalization are far greater than all other changes. This is visible from people wearing and following western dressing pattern, fast foods, hobbies, holidaying, weekend’s activities etc. Young women’s lives are made and remade through the dialectical negotiation between the locally governed rules and the globally defined fields of possibility (Kim, 2005). It is also argued that information and communication technologies will have a profound impact on the women in the globalization (Huyer&Mitter, 2003).

Customer choice continues to widen as globalization increases which requires a new cultural sensitive response from corporate sector (Cheung, 2010).

The importance of education is being realized and both the genders are being given almost same importance even in poor families today that they were 2-3 decades ago. Globalization has significantly contributed to this development. However, in contrary, the outlook towards women as a sex symbol is very high in countries such as India. This is leading to many crimes against women and hardly and serious punishments given. These activities inhibit women from taking an active participation in the workforce.

IV. Challenges:
Despite braking prejudices and barriers built over centuries for women, yet increasing numbers of such women is small. Women still face enormous pressure to conform to social mores - conforming to traditional roles within families and businesses too. Some of the challenges are discussed below:

a) Political challenges: Being women cannot choose politics as a career unlike men. In families where parents or relatives are in the politics, may give some support to enter politics or else it is largely confined to the rich and highly influential people.

b) Education: Education plays game changing role and it is evident from various studies that when women are educated, their contribution in workforce brings numerous benefits to the economy in general, financial independence, and family happiness.

c) Employment challenges: Men and women have their roles in family life and this fact cannot be ignored. Despite certain laws to protect the employment opportunity, many women lose employment on account of pregnancy and family life. Particularly, civil aviation industry is very unfriendly with airhostess. Once they are pregnant, they are immediately fired from the employment. Prevalence of patriarchal work contract both in public and private institutions especially in the Middle East countries, made limited advancement for women in public sphere. Still, ethical and cultural values strongly define the roles of gender (Metcalfe, 2008). There is a ray of hope on ‘Arab spring’ revolution which may have sown the seeds of democracy. However, it is too early to predict the future.

d) Twin roles of women: Women are confronted with dual roles of employment and family. They are vital for the smooth running of family and society at large. In today’s competitive
world, bringing up children require the attention of both parents. However, today’s job profiles are result-oriented for both genders which require high amount efforts retain a job. To excel and reach higher levels, one needs to put more efforts. Dual role of women has been significantly adding to the stress level and there is an indirect effect on productivity at work place. Many commercial organizations, especially IT companies such as Infosys has been insisting its employees to leave work place and spend time with the families. However, such companies are miniscule and ore limited to only organized sector where very insignificant number of women are employed in countries such as India.

e) **Alternative employment**: Society needs cannot be fulfilled with just men or women in isolation of the other gender. Therefore, for women’s family planning and child-care periods, there must be alternative employment. In fact, government must reserve certain employments only for women who require such jobs. Although, globalization resulted increase in mid-career opportunities for women, there needs to be done more by policy makers in diverse markets and political economies.

f) **Night shift work**: Although globalization has created many job opportunities coupled with time advantage that India enjoys especially in online services in Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs) industry, working in night shifts is posing serious challenges in the form of rapid change in the dietary habits and sleeping disorders consequently affecting the overall health in general and especially for women.

For years women have been working in hospitals and in present era of globalization, the number of women working the night shift is increasing with call centres and export oriented companies located in the Export Processing Zones employing women in large numbers.

d) **Happiness of family**: Today’s hectic work life has no time either of the parents to share sufficient time with their members of family and almost no place for relatives too. This has a significant impact on the growing children’s cultural values and their overall well-being. Therefore, both the couples need not always aim for an employment but may prioritize family life. If income is sufficient to lead a normal life, one of the couples can stay at home and the other can be earning member. This arrangement which is prevailing in many traditional families provides more peaceful living than families where both the couples are working. The best example for this is Bhutan where people are the happiest and least worried for not having high rise buildings, huge factories, and other economic development. Cultural values are prioritized with strong ethos and in fact Bhutan is measured in terms of Gross Happiness Index rather than economic index parameter of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

V. **Conclusion**:

Globalization is a concept and way of future life of every global citizen. In the process of exchanging economic values, culture too gets exchanged rapidly and nothing is constant. Criticizing globalization for increasing atrocities against women has no place at all especially when weighed against the significant benefits for women (Richards and Gelleny, 2007). It is the duty of the nation to prioritize women’s issues and make appropriate policies so that the benefits of globalization are reaped by not only women but everyone. Change is the way of life amidst never-ending technological revolution and globalization is a irreversible process and therefore, countries must learn how to adapt it for the benefit of all. Those who adapt changes rapidly will be more successful than the rest.

Despite uneven distribution of wealth and – between rich and poor and between women and men continues to be contentious issue in many nations today, there is a bright future for women in the globalization as hardly any area is left for men alone to work (Carr, et al, 2000). Let both men and
women work equally and share the responsibility of letting the world move on with sustainable policies in place.

References:


