

Globalization and its Impact on Women

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Abstract

Globalization is the process of integration of world economies and over the past two decades the economies of the nations have increasingly become interconnected and interdependent on each other. The forces of globalization are real and their impact can be felt in economic, cultural and social spheres. Globalization presents opportunities for some skilled women but has led to marginalization of a large number of unskilled women especially in developing nations. It has gender differentiated impact. The women are increasingly being absorbed in labour intensive industries but the gender wage gap and exploitation persists. It has created labour demand patterns which have resulted in Feminization of labour and Feminization of poverty. Privatization and Liberalization have not resulted in eradicating gender inequality in terms of access to resources, decision making and power. The development model which is being promoted globally is producing increasing gender inequality and environmental degradation. Globalization promotes consumerism, which has resulted in depletion of natural resources. Women are more dependent on natural resources for the fulfillment of their gender roles as care-givers and therefore suffer from the negative consequences of non-sustainable development more than men. Gender equality is essential for the development process. Sustainable human development cannot be attained without achieving gender equality. The primary purpose of this paper is to analyze the impact of globalization and development in context of socialist feminism theory and to raise awareness about gendered impact of Globalization.

Keywords : Globalization, Gender, Inequality, Feminization, Poverty.

Introduction

Globalization is the contemporary world order that has come to dominate the world since the nineties of the last century. It is an encompassing and penetrative force which has far reaching effects on all societies of the world. It mirrors cooperative as well as conflicting trends across countries at varying levels and denotes the process of increasing economic integration and growing economic interdependence between countries in the world economy. It is a multi-dimensional process and refers to the growing influence of economic, environmental, political, social and cultural processes, that are global in scope at local, regional and national levels although the economic dimension is most commonly taken into consideration during various discourses related to this process. One of the core elements of Globalization is the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) due to which the economic reforms have been initiated in developing countries. Economic restructuring aims to liberate the economy

from state control and create more prospects for producers and consumers. The current process of globalization has resulted in changes in policy goals of governments. This involves more thrust on free trade and less spending on social sector such as education, healthcare, subsidies on fuel etc. The economy of all societies is now in the middle of fundamental restructuring as per requirements of forces of globalization. New technologies require a more participatory and non-hierarchical form of work arrangement but without parallel institutional transformation new technologies are being used to oppress women and workers. The ongoing process of globalization is asymmetric and is marked by major shortcomings. The ramifications of globalization can also be seen in the social and cultural arena of society. The social dimension of globalization refers to the impact of globalization on the life of people and their families. It encompasses inclusion or exclusion of certain segments of society in the process of development. Although opportunities for women appear to have increased during the last two decades but their overall economic situation has deteriorated. The opportunities have increased only for a small number of educated and technically skilled women. A large majority of women are employed in the informal sector. Labour market changes and agrarian distress have had their impact on female workers which has become more prominent in recent years. In this context this paper examines the influence of globalization on women and throws light on gender inequality caused due to non- sustainable development practices. It is an effort to deliberate on the issue of economic restructuring and its impact on women.

Theoretical Framework

The structural oppression theories state that oppression in society is because of the fact that some people control the resources and the masses thereby deriving direct monetary benefits. The Socialist Feminism believes that capitalism is responsible for the inferior position of women in society. "Within global capitalism, women as wage earners are more poorly paid than men because patriarchal ideology assigns them a lower status. Because patriarchy assigns them responsibility for home, they are structurally more precariously positioned in wage sector employment than men and thus more difficult to organize. These two factors make them an easy source of profit for the capitalist class. The capitalism also depends on the unpaid production of women at home" (Ritzer, 2011). Thus work at home and in the economy is resulting in oppression of women. In the private sphere of home the women's work is not recognized and in the public sphere they have to face discrimination in terms of wages and also choice of employment. The arguments have been built up in this paper on the basis of this theory.

Globalization and Development

Human society has progressed through several stages. Each stage has been marked by changes in economic systems which consequently results in changes in social systems. The concept of development is used in a positive sense to indicate the processes of advancement of individuals as well as society and refers to overall

wellbeing of people. It focuses on those programmes that are designed to upgrade the standard of living of people in ways that allow them to sustain themselves. It involves progressive changes in economy and society and is an inclusive concept. It is a multi-dimensional concept and involves changes in technology, social, economic, cultural and political aspect resulting in happy human life. Development in the past two decades has resulted in transition from agrarian civilization to an urban industrialized society. It is also closely related to the concept of globalization. Both development and globalization aim towards transformation. Economic development is related to proper and adequate utilization of available resources of a country. The main goal of economic development is to increase productive capacity of people through good quality education, use of technology, adequate health services and political stability. Proper human resource management is an integral part of economic development. Globalization is regarded as that process which increases the opportunities for growth and development in all spheres of life. The advent of globalization has accelerated industrial growth which has brought new employment opportunities and occupational preferences for the Indian masses. But this choice of employment is limited only to a small group of people who possess good educational qualifications. In the recent years due to privatization, liberalization and globalization the notion of development has experienced a paradigm shift and is predominantly understood by growth in the Gross Domestic Product. Development has assumed only economic dimension due to globalization and human dimension is being neglected. "The ongoing process of globalization has given rise to consumerist culture. Much of what we wear, use and consume today has global origin. Globalization is ultimately experienced locally. Aggregate indices such as rising consumption levels cannot be considered accurate records of improvement in standard of living. Economic criteria for development have normative assumption that often marginalize other criteria for evaluating living standards. Human interactions which have been converted into measureable cash relations which discount social wealth of non-monetary activities like unpaid household labour, natural processes and community service" (Cagatuy & Erturk, 2004). The economy has neither shown sustained growth rates or significant poverty reduction nor any visible improvement in status of majority of women in the developing countries. Global effects have been gender differentiated because the access to and control over assets have been unequal. "Many people have lost their livelihoods due to economic liberalization and governments of poor countries lack the resources to help the poor and unfortunate people" (Cagatuy & Erturk, 2004). This inequality is gender based since women who lose jobs find it more difficult than men to find suitable employment again. This also refers to the widening gap between the rich and poor where majority of the resources are owned by a small segment of the population. Recent years have been characterized by growing disenchantment with globalization due to unsatisfactory outcomes in multiple areas. The asymmetric ways in which benefits of globalization have spread in the society, gender inequality, high financial volatility and environmental changes are the few causes for disappointment with globalization. The neo-liberal agenda of free trade, open markets and world capitalism which are in the interests of

transnational corporations have resulted in highly uneven effects across class and gender. Globalization has presented new challenges for gender equality and economic restructuring has proved to be detrimental to a large segment of people in developing countries.

Globalization and Women

The United Nations development Programmes in general focus on reduction of gender gap in human capability areas such as education, proper access to health care and family welfare services. These efforts are directed towards achievement of eight millennium development goals to be achieved by 2015. These goals target the major developmental challenges in the world. Goal three is to promote gender equality and to empower women. Although since 1985 the gender gap in education and health has been reduced but the recent global economic crisis has obstructed the implementation of millennium development goals and has intensified patterns of gender inequality. Moreover, the development policies followed by the government in context of globalization have ignored gender implications. The developmental model does not acknowledge the productive roles of women. When compared to the masses of unskilled female laborers in India, most of whom work in agriculture, professional women comprise only a small group. "Specific technical knowledge quickly becomes obsolete, and the policies and rules of yester-day might not serve the challenges of today or tomorrow. In the two worlds of work; unpaid care work and paid work, there continue to be pronounced imbalances across genders, reflecting local values, social traditions and historical gender roles. Care work includes housework, such as preparing meals for the family, cleaning the house and gathering water and fuel, as well as work caring for children, older people and family members who are sick—over both the short and long term. Across most countries in all regions, women work more than men. Women are estimated to contribute 52 percent of global work, men 48 percent" (Human Development Report, 2015). Thus the women face severe disadvantages both in paid and unpaid work. They are paid lesser than men and care giving work is not given any importance by the patriarchal society. It is considered their duty and the working women have double burden of work. This report is directly linked to the fact that women represent the largest proportion of the population living below poverty line. The placement of men and women is different in the economy since they have different social responsibilities. The women also face multiple constraints which are determined by intersections of caste, class and patriarchal structures. They have multiple responsibilities related to caregiving of the children as well as the elderly. Due to these constraints they are not able to respond in the same way as men to the rapid market changes. Hence, it becomes essential that a critical assessment of working conditions of women is undertaken for understanding gender perspective and the inter-linkages between the market paid economy, which is the standard focus of economic policy, and the non-market unpaid care economy are identified. The unpaid care services are essential for proper socialization of children which are beneficial to the family and larger society as a whole. The differential impacts can also be seen on urban and rural women

but the rural women suffer from additional burden of various problems since the state policies and agricultural reforms neglect gender implications and only serve to diminish the status of women. The projects of development have resulted in erosion of subsistence economy and have removed subsistence farming from women's income producing activities. Thus in addition to religion and patriarchy, economic factors are also responsible for inferior position of women. Further in response to debt burdens and under pressure from International Monetary Fund and World Bank, the government cuts welfare budgets, which again has severe implications for women. Moreover, the privatization of services along with a shift to capitalist agriculture has resulted in environmental degradation which is evidenced by increasing scarcity of water. Since rural women are the water providers depleting water resources mean new burdens for them. "The contemporary economic restructuring systematically erodes natural resources and modes of livelihood based on principles of autonomy and self-production. The first victims of any environmental degradation are the women among the poor. Shortage of drinking water, fuel wood crisis and fodder scarcity also affect women first as these are responsibilities of women" (Murthy & Gaur, 2002). Thus globalization has increased women's hardships in the struggle for survival.

Feminisation of Poverty: The Gender-Poverty Nexus

"The development policies have ignored gender implications of economic restructuring. Economic globalization, economic restructuring and neo-liberal economic policies have led to increasing informalized process of production resulting in transformation of labour markets. The formation of a flexible labour force means hiring unskilled women on temporary basis. Studies show that 94% of the total women workers are employed in the informal sector" (Patel, 2004). The women employed in informal sector are exposed to gender based discrimination in terms of wages and allocation of work without any protective labour legislations. A large majority of women labourers are migrants from rural areas who have migrated to urban areas due to erosion of agricultural economy. Due to migration the labour markets are getting feminized. The entry of large number of women in labour force has resulted in Feminization of labour. This feminization has resulted from a number of global forces in which gender roles and sex discrimination are intertwined with globalization. The women labourers are increasingly being absorbed by the urban economy mostly in low paid, insecure jobs. This labour market is segmented along many dimensions. Gender is one of the important criteria. The unskilled women are seen as sources of cheap, temporary and supplemental labour who can easily be exploited. The private sector is oriented towards profit motive and in order to lower the costs of production the labour intensive tasks have been shifted to women workers. They are used as a source of cheap labour and a tool for driving down the costs of production. In this unorganized sector discrimination against women occurs in many ways. They are forced to accept wage discrimination and are subjected to long working hours without even being provided access to basic amenities. They are subjected to gender violence, both physical and

psychological. They do not have any grievance redressal mechanism. They are classified as weak gender in informal sector and are retrenched as when the situation demands. They are considered as reserve labour who can be pulled or pushed out of job depending upon the will of the employer. Frequent changes in the work place and instability deprive them and their children of primary facilities like education, health, drinking water, sanitary facilities ration cards etc. Thus unprotected women labourers suffer from various socio-economic disadvantages and is a vulnerable group and present conditions have resulted in Feminization of poverty. These women suffer from gender discrimination at workplace as well as at home. It is still an unequal world. Women suffer from role overload because of demand placed on them for paid work and home based work. Studies have shown that burden of poverty falls more heavily on women than on men. The female headed households are the poorest of the poor. The combined effect of work place exploitation, reduced quotas for public distribution, reduction in health care and educational facilities has a devastating effect on women. Under these conditions gender-poverty nexus comes into play and results in marginalization of women in the development process.

Conclusion

Gender issues should be addressed in the context of globalization. Any kind of assessment of the advantages and costs of Globalization would be incomplete if differential outcomes for male and female workers are not taken into account. Gender equality with respect to opportunities and human rights in this era of globalization is essential for achieving social justice and inclusive development. This paper recommends formulation of gender wise re-distributive policies and emphasizes the need for sustainable development and gender equitable results. The policies based on neo-liberal development ideology need to be challenged. It is necessary to understand various aspects of gender equality in India and multitudines of problems faced by women in our society. Gender sensitive strategic thinking is required for addressing gender specific needs. The foremost gender issue which needs immediate attention is to recognize human rights of women as equal partners and participants in the development process. Various problems related to women workers should also be addressed by Human Rights organizations and should be of interest to those working in social and economic justice arena. The true purpose of development can only be achieved when there is least discrimination between genders and various social groups. The research on Globalization, development and gender should continue to develop further and improve so that inclusive development takes place to make a better world for women.

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