

Review Article

# Indian Women's Identity and Globalization

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## ABSTRACT



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Indian society has gone through a lot because of globalization and the impact it had on the life of women is prominent. This paper will look at a complex interrelationship between globalization and the changing identities of Indian women. It indicates that globalization has transformed the economic position of women, social status and the role of women in culture resulting in both the empowerment as well as challenges. Although globalization has come with opportunities like economic autonomy, enhanced education, health, and advancement of employment opportunities, there have been major problems as well that have been realized due to its effects; among others are clash of cultures and an occurrence of promotion of gender inequalities. This paper will be coming up with an analysis of these mixed implications of globalization on the traditional gender norms drawing on interdisciplinary views such as feminism, sociology and postcolonial views. It examines what role global and local forces play in creating the issues that women face and how women manage to negotiate with such changes. Besides, the article addresses the aspect of transnational movements, technology, and digital communication to re-constitute current female identities. And lastly, it reports on the wider consequences of such changes on gender equality and women empowerment in India.

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## Introduction

Globalization has become one of the most radically innovative processes of contemporary time, which completely changes economies, cultures, and social order in any part of the world. This has been especially significant to the women in India as it has turned out to not only create new opportunities but also reassert old disparities. Gender norms on the local levels have a complex interaction with world forces, and the results that have occurred thereof are contradictory and require a balanced examination. Globalization is a runaway world, as pointed out by Giddens (1990), in that it loses the classical social arrangements and designs new possibilities to connect and bind. To Indian women, this has translated into liberation on the one hand and new form of marginality in the global economies (Mohanty, 2003). Intersectional hierarchies of caste, class, and colonialism have led to the extent of gender roles as reflected by the historical background of the Indian women status (Chakravarti, 1993). There are established patterns in this regard and globalization has created a lot of turbulence through many avenues. This has increased new jobs in other areas such as information technology and cognate areas as well as retail, and services amongst other areas, as a result of economic liberalization where a few women now stand a chance to acquire wealth and social status (Freeman, 2000). Concurrently, with the neoliberal form of economy, there has been the feminization of both low-waged precarious labor in formal as well as informal sector (Sassen, 1988). Education and digital technologies have put women in a

much more empowered position by providing access to information and expansive networks, however, it is also the same technologies that make new regimes of surveillance and discipline possible (Gurumurthy, 2011). The aspects of culture and globalization are also quite complicated. On the one hand, the global media and consumer culture have undermined the traditional gender by distributing alternative definitions of femininity and the role of women (Oza, 2012). Alternatively, the same changes have resulted in the conservative backlash in most of the societies increasing the claims of the patriarchal dominance (Menon, 2012). Transnational movement of ideas has been used to create a new form of feminist rallying and action although this has served as a kind setting back the struggle of gender justice within a given locality (Desai, 2008). This antagonism between the global and Indian context constitutes one of the primary contradictions to comprehend the experiences of the contemporary Indian women. Feminist and postcolonial theoretical views are of essential significance in terms of helping deconstruct such contradictions. The role of Spivak (1988) in terms of subaltern, his seminal work on this issue is important because it reflected and shows how global power systems tend to voice-mute even as they offered streams of expression. The criticism of Western feminism by Mohanty (1984) ought to cause us to remember and keep in mind the kind of history and material circumstance which determine the lives of women in the post-colonial place. These models also serve to clarify the reasons behind the inequality of the globalization rewards to Indian women since, due to caste, class,

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religion, and geographical location, the experiences that women undergo are quite different.

In this paper, the author will look at the way the issue of globalization has evolved the economic, cultural, and political aspects of Indian women life. It attempts to show how the female world strives to keep their own unique relationship with the global world highly complicated by not providing a story of either development or decay. One sees, in the analysis, the emancipatory aspect as well as the continuing weaknesses of globalization as a process of gender equality. In locating these modern processes of change within a longer historical pattern of societal change, the work makes contributions to the grander design on the issues of development, modernity, and the position of females in the Global South. Finally, it also points out that, albeit there are valuable new opportunities offered to Indian women through globalisation, its full potential cannot be achieved, until structural inequalities limiting the level of women agency and chances, are eliminated.

## Review of literature

The coming together of globalization and gender in the Indian context has been widely studied under different analytical perspectives and has generated various opportunities of changes with a lot more issues still in existence. There are three thematic spheres highlighted in this review that synthesize the main academic contributions, namely, participation in economic life, identity in culture and feminist resistance. Sassen (1998) depicts discontents of globalization through feminized low skilled worker in India with export processing zones and services. The impacts of globalization on the rise of women in the economy and the solidification of occupational segregation are reflected as broadly by further research of Freeman (2000) on call centers and Patel (2015) on garment factories. This story is complicated by a recent study by Malin (2021) who demonstrates how internet technologies, including e-commerce, have accentuated middle classes entrepreneurship and paved the way to the exclusion of rural women in informal markets.

Other feminists, such as Mohanty (2003) and Spivak (1988), postcolonial feminists in particular, denounce global media production of homogenous images of the so-called Third World women. An ethnographic study conducted by Oza (2006) shows the way in which urban Indian women adjust to competing demands of global consumer culture and the traditional domestic roles. In the meantime, conservative opposition to the gender norms of the West is being captured by Menon (2012) in education and marriage practices, especially. The recent research on the digital territories (Gurumurthy, 2011) investigates how social media helps young women to perform a hybrid identity. Desai (2009) follows the use of global networks by the Indian women through campaigns against dowry and at work places harassment. Nevertheless, Sangari (1990) warns that the transnational activism has the potential to silence the subaltern to give way to urban elites. This study (Falkof, 2023) appraises the case of #MeToo India as a specimen of globalized feminist solidarity, wherein international structures modify themselves to domestic caste and class conditions. The betterment of macro-level transformations healthy effects in the existing literature, but the little research was conducted using the intersectional lens to study how the globalization processes affect Dalit, Muslim, or tribal women disproportionately (John, 2021). There is little data on the rural-urban divide over time, and the pandemic further increases awareness of digital inequalities, which need to be explored. What this review has shown is that in the process of globalization we can find globalization as a site of struggle where Indian women as well as the exercise of new agencies challenge Swedish, and Third World masculinities as well as patriarchies in general. These background positions form the basis of the analysis presented below which takes into

consideration dimensions that have not received sufficient attention.

## Methodology

It is theoretical research that applied a feminist postcolonial approach to globalization, which is a methodological inclusion of critical discourse analysis and intersectional theory to analyze systematically how globalization challenges Indian women identities by deconstructing the academic dissertations, policy plans, and the media discourse. Through the comparative study of Western and Indian feminist theories (Sassen, 1988), the research traces conceptual tensions onto concepts of empowerment, whereas in its intersectional analysis, the issues involving caste, class, and region locations form mediations to the experiences of women in the forces of globalization. The approach works with conceptual mapping, discursive deconstruction, and theory construction to critique the homogenized narratives, based on the theoretical triangulations and reflexive positioning, constrained by the fact that it is written in English, and any conceptual arguments have to be corroborated by the complementary empirical data corroborations.

## Theoretical framework

This research is based on an interdisciplinary frame of theory that incorporates elements of postcolonialism, feminist, and critical globalization theories to review the reworking of Indian women identities due to the actions of global forces. On the most basic level, the framework opposes universalist accounts of globalization by prioritizing the heterogeneous experience of Indian women through caste, class, and regional positioning. It can be observed by using transnational feminism approach (Mohanty, 2003) that the evidence turns away homogenized ideas of a Third World women and focuses rather on the mutual interaction of global capital and local patriarchies to generate both new possibilities and the forms of marginalization. The given perspective allows considering in detail the phenomenon of empowerment as a narrative that ceases to perceive women as only citizens who can be liberated or exploited due to neoliberal economic policies that can be applied in the situation of women holding various social positions at the same time.

The framework also incorporates important insights of Subaltern Studies (Spivak, 2020; Guha, 1997) to pursue questions of whose voices are privileged, or not, in the mainstream discourses of the effects of globalization. The strategy is especially useful when it comes to examining how the development policies and the corporate globalization projects often do not assist the least favoured women, such as those residing in the countryside or those belonging to lower caste. Applying an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989) shows that the study gets complicated with just two ways of thinking: tradition/modernity, and demonstrates that caste, religion, and urban-rural divisions produce extremely varied experiences of globalization across women in India. An example can be the urban women being upper-class and gaining new opportunities in the working environment of the governmental corporations within the urban area, whereas poorer women tend to have an insecure job in the scope of global supply chain. In order to accommodate the economic aspects of globalization, the framework will apply the writings of Sassen (1998) of which she exercises the concept of the global cities in the context of India, where I shall explore the role of women in the emerging service industries and digitalized labour-market. Cultural analyses follow Appadurai (1996) idea of the scopes by following the flow of gendered imagery in the media and consumer culture whereas the political aspect touches upon the Menon (2004) opinion of global feminist agenda in translation to India. The combination of all these views enables the possibility of gaining a wholesome

view of globalization as a battleground, both in the sense of agency of Indian women exercising it as well as being faced with structural limitations. Finally, this theoretical approach does not only criticize the globalization theories based on Western-centric approach but also brings some new conceptual instruments to gender analysis in the Global South, especially in the case of fast changing postcolonial societies such as India.

### Globalization and Indian women

The process of globalization has had some significant impact on the lives of Indian women and they have re-oriented the way they participate in the economy, their cultural identity as well as the aspirations in the society. Categorically too after economic liberalisation in India (when the economy opened up to the outside world in 1991), women have been able to get new working jobs in other fields such as IT activities and retail as well as in outsourcing, and as such some have become wealthy (Sassen, 1988). But these have been skewed changes mainly with the urban educated women, the rural or lower caste women being adversely affected as they are in precarious jobs in the informal sector (Malin, 2021). The eruption of international media and online technologies has even redesigned the gender codes, as it has introduced women to new concepts of independence and self-realization, along with generating the wave of conservative reaction (Oza, 2012).

Cultural dimension of globalization is no less complicated. Global consumerism on the one hand has re-proposed the meaning of femininity, it is promoting selfishness and career goals (Fernandes, 2006). Conversely, the conservative notions of marriage and homemaking are still present, which leaves working women with a two-fold load (Menon, 2012). Transnational feminism and digital activism (such as #MeTooIndia) allow women to challenge the patriarch systems, yet it has the potential to be restrained within other crevices because it overlaps with parts of caste and class divisions (Falkof, 2023). Another cause of contradictions in globalization has been in the political and economic agency of women. Even though microfinance and self-help groups (SEWA) have made grassroots entrepreneurship possible, neoliberal policies have also destroyed labor protections on female workers (Patel, 2015). The emergence of digitalized platforms presents new education and work opportunities but the online bullying and biases in algorithms remain the constraints that limit the participation in all aspects of society (Gurumurthy, 2011). Finally, it is a conundrum of globalization on women in India; it has liberated some and created more inequalities among others. The key to future success is policy, one that aims at eliminating structural obstacles (caste, class, urban rural divide) on the one hand and on the other seeking to leverage globalization as a driver to gender inclusive growth.

### Globalization and the evolving realities of Indian women

As a result of this study, a double nature of the way globalization has changed the lives of Indian women can be observed. Although there is certainly the opening of new avenues of empowerment in the process of economic liberalization, its impact is not equally shared among various sectors of female population (Raina, 2019). The introduction of workplaces in the realm of services, especially the so-called IT and BPO lines, empowered urban women with degrees to become financially independent of men as never before (Malin, 2021). According to Patel (2015), however, under such economic mobility, there is usually cost of heightened working demands and the so-called, the double burden of keeping up with the customary domestic roles. We found that the thesis of Sassen (1998) of feminisation of labour in the era of globalization holds water in our analysis with significant

reservations in the Indian context. Expansion of the export-based industries has also led to increased activity in terms of export-related industries but there is still a difference in caste and region. Dalit women and women in the farmlands are often stuck in unsafe informal employment with insignificant protection nets (John, 2023). This corroborates the fact that globalization (Mohanty, 2003), by and large, tends to induce externalities in new opportunities, but at the same time supports preexisting hierarchies.

The cultural aspects of globalization equally have a mixed bag of results. On the one hand, digital media has been empowering new forms of feminist solidarity (such as the #MeTooIndia movement), whereas on the other hand, it has allowed the export of patriarchal values to the rest of the world (Falkof, 2023). We have also found that young women in cities are traversing a set of hybrid identities - taking on the world of global consumption and at the same time renegotiating family roles in time-honored settings (Fernandes, 2006). Nevertheless, such cultural negotiation is still mostly closed off to women of lower socioeconomic status and, therefore, the changes are intersectional. The most important finding of the study is about the paradox of the political empowerment in the process of globalization. Although transnational feminist networks have intensified the legal efforts of equality among genders, (Sen, 2012) they have not always been able to reach the subaltern women. The subaltern woman, as Spivak (1988) warned us, is still doubly marginalized not only by the world market capital but also by local patriarchal powers. The same is seen in the fact that although microfinance programs have served to empower people economically, they have continued to support the traditional gender roles instead of challenging it.

These results are significant to policymaking. To begin with, they indicate a necessity of promoting more subtle strategies of women empowerment that will take into consideration geographical and caste inequalities. Second, they emphasize the need to regulate the digital economy in order to avoid emergence of new exploitation practices on the basis of gender. And the last is the demand of feminist movements as a space between discourses in the global world and local realities. Further studies can be taken up on longitudinal effects of globalization on various generation of Indian women especially in the wake of a period of rapid digitalization since the pandemic. Besides, the experience of religious and ethnic minorities with regards to these globalizing forces should also be studied further. With India increasingly becoming a part of the international economy, it will be imperative that more people start comprehending such gendered dynamics so as to be able to pursue equitable growth.

### Conclusion

Globalization has proved to be a beacon with two sides of lamps to the women in India that break down all the boundaries and erect new obstacles. The analysis sheds light on the fact that although economic liberalization has opened new avenues as never before women in the formal labour sector, formal education and the virtual world, this is an advantage that has been enjoyed by the urban, upper caste and middle-income classes largely. Globalization has promised to empower, yet the idea is usually in conflict with the ongoing patriarchal realities, leading to complicated identity and agency negotiations. The study highlights three important lessons: one is that globalization did not turn out to be the great equalizer it was briefly hyped up to be: rather it increased inequalities based on caste, class, and region. Second, the processes of globalization in cultures have made novel manifestations of feminist resistance and self-expression possible but tradition to which they are often followed by a traditionalist reaction. Third, digital revolution, though revolutionary, has brought about other types of gendered

precarity in the online spaces and gig economy. Going ahead, the only way to ensure providing meaningful empowerment is by having policy interventions that can break structural impediments as opposed to market-driven solutions. This involves improving the labor rights of the workers in the informal sector and creating a digital infrastructure that is more inclusive besides establishing feminist frameworks that reflect on the intersecting social stratifications in India. Gender justice in the globalized India lies somewhere between taking on new opportunities and securing against neoliberal exploitation two tasks in which global sincerity is essential, but should not deny locally based solutions. Finally, this analysis confirms the fact that Indian women are not mere creations of world forces but can be active movers and shakers who need to navigate through tricky landscapes of transformation. Their lives provide valuable information to women movements everywhere, being an example of how promises of globalization can be harnessed to more just societies.

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