

INFORMATION-BASED ECONOMY: IS REALLY EMPOWERING WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Indian liberalization policy along with digital revolution have opened up the economy abruptly at a very high pace, it is enhancing employment opportunities. Gig economy, flexible working hours, and work from home have increased the employment opportunities. But it had not benefited all the members of society equally. And the opportunities created are mostly vulnerable opportunities. Purpose of this paper is to give an over view of advantages and disadvantages of digital revaluation for women after more than three decades globalization and further how information can play a major role for an evenhanded globalization, digitalization and changing gender calculus. It is need to review our policies and re-work our strategies to stop a disaster from happening in seen that the situation facing the majority if Indian women is far from positive. There is urgent the Indian countryside. Preparation of proper strategies to empower women and bring them into the mainstream is required for developmental process.

KEYWORDS: *Digital Economy, Women Workers, Women Empowerment, Globalization, Liberalization, Digital Revaluation.*

Introduction

This paper tries to describe that what is in stock for women in this new mobile and collaborative economic world and what are the socio economic and organizational challenges to the women. Since Indian liberalization policy along with digital revolution have opened up the economy abruptly at a very high pace, it is enhancing employment opportunities. Gig economy, flexible working hours, and work from home have increased the employment opportunities. But it had not benefited all the members of society equally and the opportunities created are mostly vulnerable opportunities. Vulnerable job opportunity means long working hours or odd work timing, jobs with lower wages, difficult working conditions that undermine workers fundamental rights. Majority of the population is facing the challenges. women are the worst sufferers among the majority. Indian women are not an exception.

India is one of the world's most traditional societies, here a large part of working-women are in the rural and unorganized sectors. Majority of women in India are still tradition bound and are in a disadvantageous situation. They are among the most isolated groups. Having little opportunity to go to school and to share their ideas, views and suggestions on how to improve their activities. Yet they are in the forefront of the fight against poverty, illness and conflicts that are raging across their continent. Women, who have been involved with production activities in the traditional ways, have to cope with numerous problems and yet try to avail of the opportunities, which an open and digitalized economy promises.

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In this paper I have tried to give an overview, how Information can play major role for an evenhanded global economy and changing the gender calculus but only if it is supported by adequate national policies and favorable social and economic environment. The shifting situation will diversify the information needs of women at different levels. There is an immediate need to evolve a model suitable for the global ICT based economy with special measures to protect the rights of women.

In section II below is outlined the globalization process. While section III is an explanation of women's problems and opportunities in this process. In section IV role of information and digital world in the process of globalization is presented. Overview of information needs of women is presented in section V. finally in section VI policy implications are presented.

About Globalization

British, were, important to Indian development, in both constructive and negative ways? While the British exploited India's economy and resources as colonial rulers, they also left India, with democracy, laws, a judiciary, and a free press, 40,000 miles of railroad track, canals, and harbors, And very important, English as the language of Indian business and the English language schools. Which are arguably some of the most important remnants of the British, giving India global gateway not found in former French, Spanish or Dutch speaking colonies.

It is implicit that Globalization is an important factor in economic reforms package. Concepts of globalization include eight major factors:

- Decrease in national and international trade barriers for unhindered trade of goods
- Unrestricted flow of money between countries.
- Implementation of market friendly credit, trade and fiscal policies.
- Implementation and exchange of new technologies in production process.
- Decontrol and deregulate
- Removal of subsidies
- Curtailment of public expenditure
- Concentration of government investment in infrastructure building and basic needs.

That means a modern explanation of comparative cost advantage theory introduced by classical economist.

Globalization along with ICT based economy has ushered in complex patterns of socio-economic change world over. While enhancing opportunities for some, It also appears to shrink decent work for others, including disproportionately large segments of women from the weaker sections of society. Because women usually bear a significantly high share of the costs of economic change and adjustment associated with global ICT based economy. Before they can take advantage of the newly emerging economic opportunities, women have to overcome the constraints they face in accessing credit, skills, markets and other necessary resources. Although Indian women are more aware about their rights today with the help of internet revolution which is an outcome of globalization, the social environment have not been sensitized than until now so women's development is hindered in India. Any change could only come through the change in the whole social set-up

Where Do Women Reside

During the past few decades, women have entered the labour market in large numbers' this is as it should be. Women ought to be provided free space to take equal part in development fully. This is also pre-condition for the advancement of the country. However there are still wide gender inequalities in education, work participation, and employment in India (Shah, 2004).

Globalization had brought several changes in India's economic policies but at the same time claimed that the impacts of these reforms on Indian women are marginal. The socialization belief that women are the caretakers of homes in rural as well as urban areas has restricted most women from moving beyond their places. The cultural and religious attitudes about gender roles and relationship have continued to discourage most women from participating actively in economic activities, decision-making and interaction with men. Education and literacy are preconditions to development and determines the status of men and women with strong benefits in the areas of health agriculture and economics. Female education has remained lower than that of male (Census of India 2011). The gender inequalities limit women's capabilities and capacities that's why for improvements most of women depend only on the knowledge they have acquired in their lifetime from their friends and local resources.

Globalization and Knowledge based economy has both positive and negative effects on women. On the one hand, it has increased women's literacy and has provided more job opportunities to women, which are very attractive to the privileged, a small number of women. On the other hand majority of women in India and other developing countries find themselves stripped off the benefit of social security, government subsidy protection of labour rights and than safety nets. Women are forced to adopt low profile jobs because they lacked those skills, which are needed in high profile jobs. Women are continuously moving from organized to unorganized sectors where there are no laws against unhealthy work conditions, unequal remuneration, sexual harassment and so on. However, development requires full integration of women in the development process, because women can be utilized as development resources in many ways. They are holders of much of the world's indigenous knowledge about medicinal and agricultural uses and processing of plants and seeds. They are providers of family health care and empowering women means empowering the whole family. Majority of Indian Women is working in unorganized sector and rural areas. Global and digital economy has certainly increased the job opportunities for women but not empower women. The changes global and digital economy had brought could not change the andocentric attitude of patriarchal system and so women are facing a conflicting situation. Rolling back of the state from its responsibilities motivated the problems because it could not make demands for welfare measures from ruthless M.N.Cs, which are profit oriented.

- **Advantages**

On the positive side globalization and digital economy has contributed to bring about welcome changes in the lives of women who have been able to avail of the opportunities, which have opened up in the various sectors of development. These are:

- **Employment Opportunities:** Better Employment opportunities in technological and other advanced sectors, which have global bearing, have opened up for suitably qualified women. Some new type of job opportunities e.g. in call centers, data entry and data processing have emerged. These jobs are women dominated (Singh and Pandey, 2005, pp.684-688.).
- **Working Conditions:** Home-based work is becoming increasingly common, because of subcontracting and industrial outsourcing systems and the spread of ICT. Which allow employees to do their work in the comfort of their homes Jobs have been increasingly relocated from industrialized to developing economies, especially "back office" "in the best, a new, more informal and more appealing work culture may be apparent; Women were working even in night shifts along with men in their work places. That would all these facilities really make women bold and provide them the needed status for women. Globalization and digitalization has created new job opportunities with convenient work place but while women may benefit from the new independence of work location, "segregation and exclusion from career choices can also occur". Now job opportunities in wee hours of the morning which is the business hours for the western, developed countries is also available so that Female home-workers may be better able to balance between work and family responsibilities.
- **Education:** Prospects of higher and quality education have become feasible for those women who can afford them, economically and socially.
- **Women's Status:** Globalization has created a new awareness in women and enabled them to get information about their rights and privileges. It has linked women globally. Increase of women's movements through exposures at the global level will help bring about major changes in the economic, social and political lives of women.

Traditionally women were being considered second to men. Through Globalization digitalization we are trying to give women equal status with men. This will have positive effect on women's empowerment in the socio-economic context. With changing attitude towards women, especially in the urban areas, women enjoy more democratic set of gender relationship.

Although it enhanced women's status in economic sphere to some extent as it provides them more jobs but there is a dark reality behind this glittering picture. Basically it is an attempt to conceal the real deplorable condition of women

- **Disadvantages**

Patriarchy, social pressures and higher illiteracy rate force women to confine themselves in household activities. They have inadequate access to productive resources and improvement facilities.

Caste based discrimination and social restrictions for women are everywhere in India. Child dependency ratio and the child women ratio are higher in the poor households this holds for both the urban and the rural population. Worker population ratio are lower for males but higher for females in poor households despite higher child – women ratio and dependency burden. A further emphasized factor is lower returns to female labour compared to male labour. It is also no wonder that the poverty prevalence rates among rural as well as urban women workers are higher than those for males (Sundram and Tendulkar, 2004, pp. 5125-5132).

These basic problems have plagued the lives of Indian women and new circumstances has affected both the amount and the quality of work available to the majority of women in India:

- Most farm operations in India are traditionally women-centered; our food security depends mainly on the work of women, women's knowledge and women's skills in varied operations like seed-saving, agricultural production, food processing, local marketing and cooking. Women are the providers of food and custodians of our crop biodiversity heritage and food diversity. The long-established central role of women in food chain, from seed-keeping to food-making, agriculture, livestock, animal husbandry, and household and cottage industries including handicrafts, handlooms fisheries, etc, is being undermined with the onset of the globalised industries led by multinational giants, mechanization and automation which is becoming prevalent in the market based economy, and will adversely affect the village based traditional economy.
- As globalization shifts agriculture to a capital-intensive, chemical-intensive system, women bear the costs of displacement. When the globalization destroys rural livelihoods (Mahendra dev, 2004, pp 4415-22) it is women who lose the most. When the globalization allows dumping, which leads to a drop in farm product prices, women are hit the hardest because their incomes go down further. As the income of farmers in general and women in particular are worn they are displaced from productive roles, This has resulted in men migrating to other areas in search of work, leaving a lot of the farm operations to women who are paid much less for their work, often less than half of what men get. Instead of helping women, new technologies in the farm sector are working to their disadvantage as women are not trained in knowledge based business services.
- Privatization and reduction of public services will reduce Women's prospects of obtaining regular salaried jobs. Globalization has increased the number of low paid, part-time and exploitative jobs (Times of India, 1999). In the new division of labour, women were considered to be peripheral and temporary participants in the male dominated market economy. Decisions concerning wages and other conditions of employment were made on the assumption that men would be the main wage earners (Shah, 2004).
- Occupational sex segregation will be a stark reality in the open digital economy. This will tend to result in worse working condition, lower pay and inferior career opportunities. Over time, with changing skill requirements in many of the zones, men rather than women are being hired and the proportion of female employees has tended to drop (Shah, 2004). Migration of women especially for economic reasons often gives rise to exploitation. Since women played active roles in the productive activities, they were the sufferers as the Social and Commercial forestry has forced them to search for alternative occupations where they were being exploited ruthlessly. Women carry the heavier work burden in food production, but because of gender discrimination they get lower returns for their work (Shah, 2004).
- With male migration on the increase from the rural to urban sectors, the women have to bear the triple burden of caring, farming and paid employment in the rural sector. More importantly in the neo liberal work practices, flexible specialization and intensifying global competition contract work, unsocial hours of work, to be in the category of self-employed or own-account workers, cooperative practices, payment by result makes is very difficult for women to cope with their multiple responsibilities. Compared with employee status, self-employment and own-account work are less likely to have a strong inverse relationship with fertility (KILM, 2005).
- In private areas women are given only a few privileges but not rights. Globalization has subjected women to cultural backlash. Promoted casualization of women, while providing jobs to women, proper facilities like crèches are not available in the workplaces where

women could fulfill their responsibilities. Instead, women are under a double burden both at the office and at home (Shah, 2004).

- Privatization of education and training facilities will increase the cost of getting educated. When family budgets are readjusted, female children will be the main casualties because most of the resources will be spent on educating the males, who are the main breadwinner of society.

Liberalization and globalization of the economy will marginalize the majority of women in India due to a reduction of traditional employment opportunities, reduction of wages, casualization of jobs, and women worker's exclusion from the modernized production process due to lack of education and training (Sivachithappa 2014).

Role of Information

Information is a vital tool for the empowerment of individuals to enable them to make an informed decision or actions for themselves or the community. It is believed that the modern-day phenomenon of Information and communication are the key to flow for development, especially in the Globalization and liberalization scenario, and many different methods are already being used in rural areas, such as radio, video, theatre, social networks, etc.

In the World Development Report, it is observed that the spread of relevant information through technology will help in bridging the gaps between those who access the information and those who do notⁱ. The creation of knowledge is becoming more and more vital. Also, the use of integrated ICT is growing in handling the flows of information in organizations, and in their relationships with suppliers, clients, and among themselves also. Information, however, only becomes useful if it is relevant, timely, and appropriate. The choice of carrier or channel, that transmits information, must also be appropriate, perceivable, and affordable to the user. It must also allow two-way communication to occur. Indeed, ICT may not be the priority in every area. Women's most important concerns are with the political problems they face and other related issues such as poverty and food shortages. But there are examples where ICTs have played a key role in increasing women's access to opportunities. This will be a major step towards poverty reductionⁱⁱ. India has seen a number of experiments to wire the rural sector to provide the right information to the right person at the right time and placeⁱⁱⁱ.

In India in 1999, there were only 300,000 estimated internet connections, utilized by an estimated 1.5 million internet users, compared with more than a third of the households that are wired for the internet in the United States. Investment bankers project that by 2002 the number of Internet users in India could rise to 30 million. Currently, 80 percent of Indians connected to Internet use it mainly for e-mail. 70 million Indian homes that are less than half of India's nearly 180 million households (made larger by joint families,) have TVs. Almost 30 million have cable. Satellite TV arrived in 1991^{iv}. Many different methods are available and are already being used even in rural areas of India such as radio, video, theater, social network, mobile etc. While India clearly has access to important gateways of globalization, such as well-established channels of media and commerce and this progress is really heartening but the ultimate question is, whether these gateways of globalization will bring real progress to India.

All these commendable gateways act as information supply agents, which do not deal with information demands of special groups such as women, villagers and disadvantages groups. Mostly all information on internet is in English. However there are efforts to give Hindi and regional language but the slop is still towards educated few.

Information Needed

Globalization is a window to information revolution, which has included the desires, needs and resources of mankind within its framework. The benefits of the globalization have not reached the lower sections of society especially women. Women being the lowest in the socio-economic rung should be given the privilege of being one of the most important recipients of information meant to reduce the socioeconomic gap.

Human beings are not homogenous, given the differing gender needs. Neither is women themselves homogenous due to their differing status in society. Information needs of women in the new globalized environment are diverse according to their socio- economic situation. The information needs will differ among poor, lower middle class and upper middle class women, educated, uneducated and entrepreneurs.

- **Women entrepreneurs and farmers**

Female entrepreneurs need information about:

- Prices;
- Markets;
- Credit;
- To gain new business skills such as in record keeping and developing products and services;
- Cost of their products on the market;
- The demand and supply;
- Advertisement and marketing of their products;
- Disease control in agriculture;
- Technical training courses;
- Meteorological report;
- Government schemes / programmes and policies;
- Important contacts for their business;
- Water, manure, and soil management,

These are undeniably valuable information, and with help of this, women entrepreneurs can have had greater access to markets for their products and to credit, they can improve their productivity, skills and quality of products. Technology gave them incredible opportunities⁹.

- **Students and Educated Middle Class Women**

The rural as well as urban women students and educated middle class women are in the process of steadily breaking the traditional image of women and are functioning towards improved education and economic independence. They are more flexible and excited towards changes. They are in need of information about -

- Inexpensive Educational opportunities, distance education, education opportunities outside their city / villages, information about various entrance and competitive exams, model question papers, on line libraries, scholarships;
- Career advancement and job opportunities in both formal and informal sectors;
- Govt. assistance programs for career advancement, education and health;
- Inexpensive Health and childcare services;
- Legal rights and provisions, to counter crime and injustice against women.

- **Poor Women**

A large chunk of women who have been adversely affected by the globalization process are the lower class women, the largest group, which has been marginalized from getting any need-based information. Though this is the most active group of women with higher participation rate (Sundram and Tendulkar, 2004, pp.5125-5132). Information system specially designed for the rural poor has to be need based according to their economic, social and familial position, and only for subsistence. They need to know about-

- Technical training facilities
- Migration facilities/ possibilities
- Free of cost Health and child care facilities specially family planning;
- Traditional and new Job opportunities in the low paid informal sector including domestic services
- Cheap housing availability specially in slums
- Adult education, literacy programs, free educational facilities for their children and Children's development programmes.
- Information regarding Govt. programmes for the poor
- Legal provisions against sexual harassment, domestic violence and social injustice.

- **Higher Middle Class Women**

The urban and rural higher middle class women need information mainly concerning to:

- Research, Educational opportunities including prospects abroad;
- Career advancement facilities, Job/ employment prospects in India and abroad;
- Fashion and market values;
- Modern Health and child care facilities;
- Art and entertainment;
- Legal rights and provisions

Policy Implications

It is seen that the real situation facing the majority of Indian women is far from positive. Women get information through various sources that are often not geared to their specific requirements.

What are the tools and resources that need to be put in place in order to open access to vital information for women, how can we create a strong, responsive knowledge base to support women's economic, social and political empowerment? In responding to these needs, the following requirements were established:

- It is essential to focus on literacy and ICT education starting with females at a young age, since this is still denied to so many women. Projects should combine literacy programs along with training on information technology. ICTs as part of basic education systems are necessary to ensure sustainability.
- Integration of available sources of information to enhance the accessibility and visibility of information needs of the women;
- Coordination of information generated and broadcasted by key stakeholders.
- Every development policy should include an information and communication component. Policy makers need to pay attention to information generation and dissemination for women's development. State has a responsibility in implementing the policies. NGOs and the Govt. departments should generate information about women.
- It is important that the women should give a central role in the generation and dissemination of this information. Just as NGOs and the Government have come together to make poverty alleviation and literacy programmes successful through women centric initiatives. Programs have to involve women in defining the purpose, content and delivery of information in order to ensure that it is appropriate and practical.
- The content material must be have immediate value to the users, relevant and addresses needs in the local context, accessible to an audience with little or no reading skills. ICT managers have to utilize audio and video, facilities to reach the illiterate women. Mass media and interpersonal communication should be used extensively to improve information dissemination. ICT projects need to build on the resources and knowledge of local communities.
- The information must be in the language of the users to reach the un-reached and to ensure widespread viability.
- The tool must be affordable in cost
- The tool must be easy to use. It should be keep in mind that the audience for this new information tool would be first time users, the new tool was expected to deliver not only useful information but also a positive experience.
- Women have to be made aware of their information needs as well. Once women make their decisions based on information relevant to them, their requirements will also be fulfilled as per their own terms.

It is need to review our policies and re-work our strategies to stop a disaster from happening in seen that the situation facing the majority if Indian women is far from positive. There is urgent the Indian countryside. Preparation of proper strategies to empower women and bring them into the mainstream is required for developmental process. There is a need to conduct research in India on the information needs of women, because this is a very vital aspect and a prerequisite for any developmental process.

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ⁱ world bank report (2001), www.worldbank.org

ⁱⁱ For details refer to Mathur, J. (2005)

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^{iv} data obtained from www.aliciapatterson.org/apf2101/Wells

^v www.mssrf.org