ARYAVART SHODH VIKAS PATRIKA
RNI TITLED NO. UPBIL04292
RNI REG. NO. UPBIL/2014/66218
PP. NO.- 211-216

ISSN NO.-2347-2944 (Print)
e-ISSN NO.-2582-2454 (Online)
Vol.-14, No.-I, Issues-19, YEAR- March-2021

Globalisation and Gender Equality in India

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Received- 02.01.2021, Revised- 11.01.2021, Accepted - 19.01.2021

Abstract: ***Globalisation has significantly influenced the socio-economic landscape of India, bringing both opportunities and challenges for gender equality. The process of economic liberalisation, technological advancement, and increased global connectivity since the early 1990s has expanded employment opportunities, improved access to education, and facilitated greater participation of women in various sectors of the economy. With the growth of industries such as information technology, services, and global supply chains, women have increasingly entered the workforce, contributing to their economic empowerment and social mobility.***

Key words- opportunities, economic, liberalisation, global.

Globalisation has also encouraged the diffusion of international norms related to human rights, gender justice, and women's empowerment, strengthening policy frameworks and institutional initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality. However, the benefits of globalisation have not been uniformly distributed across different groups of women. While urban and educated women have gained better employment prospects and access to resources, many rural and marginalized women continue to face challenges such as wage inequality, job insecurity, informal employment, and limited access to social protection. Global market competition has also led to the expansion of informal and precarious work, where women are often overrepresented. Despite these challenges, globalisation has played an important role in promoting gender awareness, strengthening civil society movements, and encouraging policy reforms aimed at empowering women. Initiatives related to women's entrepreneurship, digital inclusion, skill development, and financial inclusion are gradually enhancing women's participation in economic and social spheres. Therefore, while globalisation has created new avenues for women's advancement in India, sustained policy efforts and inclusive development strategies remain essential to ensure that the gains of globalisation translate into meaningful and equitable gender equality across all sections of society. Present paper purports to examine the theoretical perspective of globalisation and gender equality in Indian context. The paper is based on secondary data and critical review of pertinent literature.

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Globalisation has emerged as one of the most significant forces shaping economic, social, and cultural transformations across the world. It refers to the increasing interconnectedness of economies, societies, and cultures through the expansion of international trade, technological advancement, cross-border investment, and the rapid flow of information and ideas. In the context of India, the process of globalisation gained momentum after the economic reforms of 1991, which liberalised trade, encouraged foreign investment, and integrated the Indian economy with global markets. These changes have had far-reaching implications for various aspects of society, including employment patterns, education, governance, and gender relations.

Gender equality, which refers to the state in which women and men enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and access to resources, is a key component of inclusive and sustainable development. Over the past few decades, globalisation has played a complex role in shaping the discourse and practice of gender equality in India. On one hand, it has opened new opportunities for women by expanding employment prospects, enhancing access to education and information, and facilitating participation in economic and public life. The growth of sectors such as information technology, business process outsourcing, retail, and service industries has created new avenues for women's employment and entrepreneurship. Increased global communication and the spread of international norms related to human rights and gender justice have also contributed to greater awareness about women's rights and empowerment.

In India, efforts to promote gender equality have been supported by various constitutional provisions, policy initiatives, and development programmes aimed at improving women's education, health, employment, and political participation. Global commitments

ISSN NO.-2347-2944 (Print)
e-ISSN NO.-2582-2454 (Online)
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such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality), have further strengthened national initiatives toward women's empowerment. Moreover, civil society organisations, international agencies, and grassroots movements have played an important role in advocating gender-sensitive policies and promoting women's participation in development processes.

This Paper examines the impact of globalisation on gender equality in India by analysing its economic, social, and institutional dimensions. It explores how global economic integration has influenced women's employment, education, empowerment, and participation in development, while also highlighting the emerging challenges and policy responses necessary for achieving inclusive and gender-equitable growth.

Theoretical Perspective: Since the end of the World War II, the global economy has experienced an unprecedented rise in international economic integration, commonly referred to as globalization. This process has been characterized by the rapid expansion of international trade, cross-border investment, technological diffusion, and the increasing mobility of capital, goods, services, and information across national boundaries. Globalization has fundamentally reshaped economic structures, labour markets, and social relations across both developed and developing countries. A large and expanding body of scholarly literature has examined the wide-ranging consequences of globalization for economic growth, social development, political institutions, and cultural transformation (Potrafke, 2015;).

Scholars have increasingly investigated whether economic integration contributes to the diffusion of progressive gender norms and values across societies. Globalization facilitates the movement not only of goods and capital but also of ideas, social practices, and institutional frameworks. Through international trade, communication technologies, migration, and cultural exchange, societies become exposed to new norms related to human rights, gender justice, and social inclusion. However, despite significant progress over the past few decades, women in many developing countries continue to face substantial disadvantages in access to human rights, education, economic opportunities, and political participation (Eastin, 2018). Structural inequalities, discriminatory legal systems, and persistent socio-cultural norms often restrict women's empowerment and limit their participation in decision-making processes.

Studies also distinguish between de jure globalization, which refers to policy-based openness such as trade agreements and regulatory reforms, and de facto globalization, which reflects actual economic activities and cross-border flows of trade, investment, and information. Evidence suggests that the influence of globalization on gender equality is driven primarily by de facto globalization rather than by formal policy commitments alone. This indicates that real economic interactions, cultural exchanges, and labour market participation play a more significant role in shaping social attitudes and institutional change. Continuous cross-border interactions expose societies to diverse ideas and practices, thereby encouraging shifts in cultural norms related to gender roles and equality. Moreover, the positive impact of globalization on gender equality appears to be stronger in lower-income and developing countries. As a result, globalization has the potential to accelerate social transformation and promote gender equality, particularly when supported by appropriate domestic policies, legal reforms, and institutional frameworks. However, realizing these benefits requires inclusive economic strategies that ensure women across different socio-economic groups can effectively participate in and benefit from the opportunities created by globalization.

Globalization and Gender Equality: Globalization-commonly understood as the growing interconnectedness of economies, societies, and cultures-has significant implications for gender equality. It influences gender relations through multiple economic, social, and institutional channels. Scholars have debated whether globalization strengthens or weakens gender equality, as its effects often vary across countries and sectors. While many theoretical perspectives suggest that globalization increases the demand for female labour, they differ in their assessment of whether higher female labour force participation ultimately improves women's rights, empowerment, and social status. Comprehensive reviews of the globalization

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e-ISSN NO.-2582-2454 (Online)
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literature can be found in studies such as Goldberg and Pavcnik (2007), Docquier and Rapoport (2012), Potrafke (2015).

A significant body of empirical research indicates that globalization tends to expand employment opportunities for women by increasing labour demand in export-oriented industries and globally integrated service sectors. Studies by Fontana and Wood (2000), Ozler (2000), and Jensen (2012) show that trade liberalization and global production networks often encourage the recruitment of women workers, particularly in labour-intensive industries. However, insights from feminist economics and development economics suggest that rising female labour force participation does not automatically translate into improved working conditions or greater gender equality.

In developing countries, export-oriented industries such as textiles, garments, and electronics frequently employ large numbers of women workers, but working conditions in these sectors are often characterized by low wages, limited job security, and weak labour protections (Gray et al., 2006). Furthermore, globalization may intensify competition among countries seeking foreign investment, sometimes leading to a "race to the bottom" in labour standards. This competition can disproportionately affect women workers, who are often concentrated in low-wage and informal employment sectors (Ozler, 2000). In addition, the concentration of women in certain labour-intensive occupations may reinforce patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes, both within households and in broader societal structures (Gray et al., 2006).

Despite these challenges, globalization also has the potential to promote gender equality through several positive mechanisms. Increased demand for female labour can enhance women's economic independence and strengthen their bargaining power within households and communities. As women gain access to income and employment, particularly in the formal sector, they often experience greater autonomy and improved decision-making power (Becker, 2010). Economic integration can also increase the demand for skilled labour, encouraging greater investment in education for girls and women. For instance, multinational companies often introduce workplace policies related to equal pay, non-discrimination, and maternity benefits, which can influence labour standards in host countries (Black & Brainerd, 2004). International institutions, particularly the United Nations, also promote gender equality through global frameworks, policy advocacy, and development programmes (Moghadam, 1999). These initiatives frequently encourage governments to adopt legal reforms addressing gender discrimination, wage equality, and workplace protections.

Finally, globalization can indirectly strengthen women's rights by encouraging political and economic elites to adopt reforms that align with international norms and expectations. Governments seeking to attract foreign investment or maintain international legitimacy may introduce policies promoting gender equality and social inclusion (Gray et al., 2006). This dynamic is consistent with broader theories of modernization and rights diffusion, which suggest that economic openness and global engagement often contribute to progressive social policy changes (Becker, 2010; Berik et al., 2009). The relationship between globalization and gender equality is complex and multifaceted. While globalization can create new economic opportunities and promote progressive norms, it can also reproduce existing inequalities if supportive institutional frameworks and gender-sensitive policies are absent. Therefore, understanding these mechanisms is essential for designing policies that ensure globalization contributes to inclusive and equitable gender development.

Women, Gender and Development:

Development is commonly understood as a process of progress or positive transformation in the socio-economic conditions of individuals, communities, and nations. It encompasses improvements in income, education, health, social justice, and overall quality of life. However, the concept of development cannot be fully understood without considering gender relations, since women have historically been marginalized in economic, social, and political spheres. In many societies, development processes have disproportionately benefited men, while women have remained excluded from access to resources, decision-making power, and opportunities for advancement. Consequently, the study of gender has become an essential component of development discourse.

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The relationship between development and gender has been extensively discussed in development studies and feminist scholarship. According to Amartya Sen, women should not be viewed merely as passive beneficiaries of welfare or development programmes but as active agents of social and economic transformation. Sen's capability approach emphasizes expanding people's freedoms and opportunities, arguing that empowering women through education, employment, and political participation contributes significantly to overall social progress (Sen, 1999). This perspective highlights that gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also a critical factor in achieving sustainable development.

During this period, the concept of Women in Development (WID) gained prominence. The WID approach sought to integrate women into mainstream development initiatives by emphasizing their productive roles and examining how development policies affect women's social and economic status. The approach highlighted the need to ensure that women benefit equally from development programmes, especially in areas such as employment, education, health, and access to resources. The WID framework also emphasized that development should not be assessed solely in terms of economic growth but rather through the equitable distribution of economic benefits. In this context, a key question often raised in development analysis is "who receives what," emphasizing the importance of fairness and inclusion in resource allocation.

Gender and Sustainable Development Goal: The systematic assessment of economic development from a gender perspective gained significant momentum during the mid-1990s with the publication of the Human Development Reportby the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The1995 Global Human Development Report marked a major milestone in the global discourse on gender equality because it attempted to quantify gender disparities through the introduction of the Gender Development Index (GDI). The GDI was designed as a modified version of the Human Development Index (HDI) that incorporates gender-based inequalities in key dimensions of human development. Essentially, the GDI measures the extent to which women and men achieve similar levels of development outcomes; a value closer to one indicates greater equality between the achievements of men and women (UNDP, 1995; Development Alternatives, 2015).

Gender equality contributes not only to social justice but also to economic development and societal well-being. The global commitment to gender equality within the SDG framework has been strongly influenced by earlier international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women(CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted during the Fourth World Conference on Women. These frameworks established comprehensive guidelines for governments to promote women's rights and eliminate gender-based discrimination. UnderSDG 5, several specific targets have been formulated to monitor progress toward gender equality and women's empowerment.

The women-led development approach represents a transition from the earlier paradigm of "women's development" to a more comprehensive framework that places women at the centre of development planning and decision-making. This shift aligns with global commitments to gender equality, particularly the goals outlined in the United NationsSustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize the importance of empowering women and girls for achieving sustainable and inclusive development (United Nations, 2015). Within this framework, gender equality is not only regarded as a fundamental human right but also as a critical driver of economic growth, social stability, and national progress.

Programmes promoting digital literacy, vocational training, and higher education aim to equip women with the knowledge and skills required to participate in emerging sectors of the economy. Such initiatives are particularly important in the context of globalization and technological transformation, where access to information and innovation plays a crucial role in economic participation.India's women-led development strategy reflects a broader shift in development thinking that recognizes women as key contributors to economic growth and social transformation. By promoting women's participation in entrepreneurship, governance,

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education, and technology, the policy framework seeks to create an enabling environment in which women can play a leading role in shaping the country's development trajectory. This approach not only advances gender equality but also contributes to inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

Conclusion: Globalization has significantly influenced the socio-economic landscape of India and has created both opportunities and challenges for achieving gender equality. The integration of the Indian economy with global markets has expanded access to education, employment, technology, and information for women, thereby enhancing their participation in economic and social activities. The analysis of gender and development indicators highlights that despite improvements in human development outcomes, gender disparities persist in areas such as labour force participation, income distribution, and political representation. More recently, India's policy framework has increasingly emphasized a women-led development approach, which seeks to position women not merely as beneficiaries of development but as active leaders and contributors to economic growth and social transformation. Initiatives related to financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, political participation, and skill development reflect this shift toward a more inclusive development model.In conclusion, while globalization and policy reforms have opened new avenues for women's empowerment in India, achieving substantive gender equality requires sustained institutional support, gender-sensitive policies, and social transformation. Strengthening women's access to education, economic resources, leadership opportunities, and digital technologies will be essential for ensuring that the benefits of globalization translate into equitable and inclusive development for all sections of society.

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ISSN NO.-2347-2944 (Print)
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