

Gender Issues and Globalization: The Perspective of Women Entrepreneurs**Author Details:**

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Abstract: *This article deals with relevant gender problems which are common in women entrepreneurs in Manipur, from the lens of globalization. Competition to reduce the throat is an integral part of the globalization process, which requires only the best for survival. But in our patriarchal society, women entrepreneurs have to face various gender-related discriminations. Many socio-cultural obstacles arise from the proposal of a business to the distribution of the scope of financial matters. Restrictions in mobility in the area and time hamper their chances of active competition with global giants. This type of gender disparities is also commonly visible in many support institutions. Moreover, globalization itself constitutes a gender bias in the Manipur branch: women entrepreneurs are forced to compete in the low-cost informal sector, while male entrepreneurs prefer the high-risk, modernised sector. Women have lost their traditional activities due to the large influx of goods from neighboring countries that came with trade liberalization as part of the national economic policy after 1991. Overall, women entrepreneurs have been the biggest losers in this process, with no benefits and facing major problems. Thus, this article will bring viable measures that allow women entrepreneurs to join and take advantage of globalization.*

Key words: Women Entrepreneurs, Globalization, Gender Issues.

Introduction

Globalization is a powerful worldwide trend that is advancing almost unstopably to eliminate trade restrictions between nations, facilitating the unrestricted movement of capital and sparking technological, cultural, and political changes and interactions. Numerous scholars emphasize it as "a double-edged sword, a force that is both civilizing and destructive" (Guillen, 2001; Jiang Zemin, 2001). Examining its influence and/or the challenges faced by women globally is not only intricate, requiring thorough multifaceted research methods, but also a critically important responsibility for policymaking bodies, as no nation can sustain a robust economy unless its female population's economic situation improves and strengthens. Based on the premise that women entrepreneurs (being women themselves) experience similar effects as other women in the state, despite having their own unique characteristics, this paper aims to explore the gender-biased issues prevalent among Manipuri women in general and female entrepreneurs in the state specifically through the perspective of globalization.

Globalization

Different people observe globalization process differently from different angles. To Friedman, Globalization is the integration of markets, finance and technologies in a way that is shrinking the world from size medium to size small and enabling each of us to reach around the world farther and cheaper than ever before (Giddens, 2001, p.6). Similarly, Martin Albrow defines globalization as all those process by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society (Croucher, 2004, p.10). Again Arjun Appadurai considers it on the bases of five scapes under which current global flows occur. As he says, they occur in and through the growing disjunctures between ethnoscape (people), technoscape (machinery), financescape (money), mediascape (images) and idea scape (ideas) (Appadurai, 1990, p.301).

G.T. Vinig and J. de Kluijver(2007) used the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) data for measuring level of entrepreneurship at a country level, and the KOF index of globalization for measuring level of globalization of a country. A positive relationship between the development of a country's level of globalization and the rate of entrepreneurship was hypothesized based on entrepreneurship and globalization literature. At the end, they observed that no statistical evidence for correlation between the level of globalization and the level of entrepreneurship at a country level when tested for all countries in their sample. When testing for low-GDP countries however they found a negative effect of globalization on entrepreneurship. A reasonable interpretation is that increased globalization and operation of MNE decrease the level of necessity entrepreneurship in low GDP countries.

Gender Biases

“Not all women are poor, and not all poor people are women, but all women suffer from discrimination”(Kabeer, 1996:20). Indeed in any society, role of female, right from household domain to social domain are almost invariably less valued. Women have to fulfill the reproductive role of bearing and raising children, caring for other family members, and household management tasks(unpaid care work), home based production(subsistence production) and voluntary social works(Elson, 2002). UNDP (1995) estimates that in developed countries, women's unpaid work produces an output equivalent to at least half of GDP. In the world as a whole, women's unpaid work is estimated to produce an output of \$11 trillion, compared to a global GDP of about \$23 trillion. But who acknowledge their sacrifice and what has been done in return to improve their status in the society?

Gender equality is the prerequisite of a civilized society. But everywhere there are plenty of evidences to prove that it is far from reality and expectations. Everywhere the traditional gender stereotypes are practicing albeit there might be variations in degree. As women constitute half of the total population, gender bias on the social, political and economic sphere has serious implications on these domains.

Inability to raise their voices loud and with thrust for their causes in many social, political and economic institutions due to their low participation rate is the root cause of such an uncivilized and inhuman culture called gender discrimination that is perpetuated in the society. For instance, in economic sphere, women are under represented among the main decision-makers in financial markets and institutions. The boards of the World Bank and the IMF are strongly dominated by men. In the World Bank, less than 10 per cent of the Executive Directors and Senior Officers are female(World Bank Annual Report 1999). Likewise, G-7 decision making can hardly be regarded as democratic (I. V. Staveren, 2001), and certainly not as gender balanced. Likewise, the World Trade Organisation is an almost exclusively male forum. The same culture holds true in most of the private sector corporate and government offices also.

Women Entrepreneurs

According to Medha Dubhashi Vinze (1987), “a woman entrepreneur is a person who is an enterprising individual with an eye for opportunities and an uncanny vision, commercial acumen, with tremendous perseverance and above all a person who is willing to take risks with the unknown because of the adventurous spirit she possesses”. Thus, a woman entrepreneur is one who starts business and manages it independently and tactfully, takes all the risks, faces the challenges boldly with an iron will to succeed.

In fact, woman entrepreneurs represent new dynamic, hardworking and skillful chunks of new generation women who think of business whether it may be small or large, takes all the risks and face the challenges boldly for the success and smooth running of the enterprise/business. They are not only the warrior of self-economic independence but also an important agent for the economic development of the family as well as the nation.

Gender Issues of Globalization on Women Entrepreneurs

Many scholars argued that it should be impossible for globalization to have a neutral impact on women and men, i.e. be equally positive or negative, when: i) pre-existing conditions are biased against women; ii) policy-making institutions do not conduct policy evaluations and neglect the gendered outcomes of

globalization; and iii) growth is dependent upon women's unpaid reproductive work (Maria Thorin, 2001).

There are various opinions regarding the reasons for gender biased effects of globalization. Benería and Lind (1995) argue that trade expansion will have a differentiated impact by gender since it is preceded by labour market segmentation by gender. Baden (1998) argues that since markets are not gender-neutral institutions in themselves, any efforts to liberalize them must have different implications for men and women engaged in these markets.

"Trade policies have different consequences for women and men because women and men differ in their access to economic resources, their social responsibilities, and in their biological make up. Thus, trade policy impacts on the economic, social, cultural and political welfare of both men and women in particular ways that concern each" (Antropus, Peggy, n.d.).

"Gender equality implications arise because trade liberalization, per se, does not eliminate existing gender inequality in access to resources, power and decision making. Rather trade liberalization may build on or exacerbate the negative conditions already affecting women's lives".

Finally, there is the argument that the reproductive/care economy is even more crucial for economic growth under the structural changes of globalization than probably ever before. The care economy is needed to buffer the negative social effects during economic crisis and the social effects of strengthened deflationary demands.

From observations recorded till now, globalization is not a virtue at least for women and women entrepreneurs in the least developing economies. In addition, it also has profound gender discriminating effects. With globalization, gender biases in markets and governance tend to grow as the scale of markets and economic policies increases. For example, although the globalization of finance has decreased many barriers to obtain credit and to invest, female entrepreneurs remain marginalized in many respects (Staveren, 2002).

Globalization processes perpetuate greater negative effects on women than on men. For many women it simply means greater insecurity and hardship. For example, austerity measures connected with IMF/World Bank-supported structural adjustment programs (SAPs) tend to fall more heavily on women.

In most households, women are responsible for maintaining consumption levels (care economy), a task that becomes more difficult with SAP measures like cost-recovery fees for health care and education, increased import prices for food and medicine after a currency devaluation, and the abolition of subsidies on basic goods and services (UNDP, 1995).

Both the reduction of public services and the privatization of public services affect women more than men, given women's lower incomes and attributed responsibilities in the household (UNICEF, 1989).

As a rather optimistic view, Black and Brainerd (1999) however, claim that increased economic liberalization (globalization) and stiffened competition will reduce all kinds of discrimination, including gender discrimination, as business no longer can afford the inefficiency and cost associated with discrimination. But the horizon of gender equality is still far away from present reality. Some women who work in traditionally male-dominated fields say being accepted by clients is a tall task. "Sometimes your gender can hinder you from showing your ability because a prospect doesn't believe you are capable," says Ranjini Poddar, the co-founder and president of the Cedar Knolls, N.J.,-based technology consultancy Artech Information Systems (Diana Ransom, 2011).

Globalization and Women Entrepreneurs in Manipur

Competition on the theme of survival for fittest is the crux of globalized world. If our women entrepreneurs are capable players in the global market then their products can reach any part of the globalized world and hence they can handsomely contribute to state, national and global economy.

But, Manipur with its captive economy and negligible industrial infrastructure and favourable environment is one of the poorest states in the country that perpetuate severest side effects of globalization on its women entrepreneurs. Without any protective shields around and no supportive women specific policies and assistances, women entrepreneurs of the state face vulnerable challenges. So, many of them lose their traditional based businesses to huge influx of cheap and fashionable commodities from neighbouring countries. These women population along with educated women paves their path to other form of entrepreneurship (mostly small ventures with low budgets). In the process they also lose their freedom of enjoying home-work balance. Without much assistance and support from financial and concern institutions; their lack of skills in market and technology; and lack of confidence along with less efficient infrastructures makes many women own business ventures fast sick and extinct.

However, these much competitions and severity of negative impacts of globalization is hardly experienced by male entrepreneurs in the state as there is no major male specific business in the state that is replaced. And hence the impact is not neutral.

Competition with global players in the global market requires the internalization of our businesses or at least save the local market. But it demands huge start up capital and huge working capital. For a women entrepreneur, many socio-cultural obstacles arise right from the proposal of business venture to allocation volume of financial matters. In our patriarchal society, they suffered less appreciation from the society. Women's property rights are often assumed to be secured via the (male) household head. In the case of joint property, women need the permission of their husbands to use these assets as collateral for obtaining credit, whereas men generally do not require such permission from their wives. Women's limited possession of property and their constrained property rights limit their access to finance and financial markets.

To be a major player in the globalize market or at least to survive powerful global impacts, women entrepreneurs have to exercise maximum mobility to gather market information and to interact with business community from inside outside the state. But in our gender bias society, women have limited rate of mobility. Restrictions in mobility in area and time hinder their chance of active competition with global giants. Gender biasness is also commonly visible in many supporting institutions.

Maintaining work hours is yet another major problem that clearly differentiates male and female entrepreneurs. Male entrepreneurs enjoyed flexible work hours and can devote time. While most female entrepreneurs have limited working hour as they perform dual role. This surely retards their stamina and their enthusiasm to compete global counterparts.

Conclusion:

Globalization has become an undeniable historical necessity, embraced before we were fully ready. Consequently, female entrepreneurs in our country are struggling to compete with their international rivals. The time has come to cultivate a shared understanding by gathering insights from all relevant organizations and motivated thinkers to create an appropriate entrepreneurial climate and foster the essential entrepreneurial spirit in the state. Furthermore, both federal and state governments should offer robust infrastructure, necessary support, and protective legislation for women in business. Most importantly, the deeply ingrained pattern of gender discrimination must be eradicated from the perspective of social, political, and financial institutions to counteract the adverse effects of globalization.

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