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## **Globalization, Youth, and Gender Identities**

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India is a land of diversities and multiplicities in terms of culture, religion, castes, languages, ethnicities, etc. Whatever applies to India automatically applies to its inhabitants including the youths. Youth lives in multiple worlds. They socialize them in different ways. They represent a generation and carry the burden or responsibility of the older generations in the name of transmitting the culture from generation to generation. However, their worlds are not static since they have been impacted by modernizing processes. Globalization, in addition, has brought a new wave of transformations and dynamism in terms of modern cultural, technological, and social values. In the meantime, the change brought about by globalization puts challenges and dilemmas in terms of youth's aspirations, and their quest towards identity formation in a kind of 'global' spaces. The challenge that we confront is, therefore, to map the dynamics of this change, to see how the processes that are producing transformation are being refracted through the lens of Indian youth. After recognizing that there are multiple life worlds, and multiple responses to the encounter with modernity and globalization, we have, here, set about exploring the world of Indian youth.

Giddens (1991) suggests that globalization can be defined as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'. Harvey (2003) states that globalization should primarily be regarded as being about the interdependence of societies on a world scale, about existing links and those that can be developed globally between individuals, communities, nations, and organizations.

Young people are most directly affected by globalization and therefore central to current debates on identity. They are experiencing the process on an everyday basis through employment patterns, the friendship groups they develop, their usage of technology (particularly for social networking), and wider cultural influences on their lifestyles (Burbules and Torres, 2000, Kenway and Bullen, 2008). They are surrounded by a 'dizzying array of signs and symbolic resources dislodged from traditional moorings', are the main targets of global consumer cultures, and are increasingly targeted with messages concerning global social problems (Dolby & Rizvi, 2008). Everyone's lives are shaped by the forces of globalization, increased migration, and greater social pluralism (Ajegbo et al., 2007).

Identities often appear to be 'natural' that is something men and women are born with. But, these identities are socially constructed through cultural practices and socialization. With the ongoing process of globalization and modernization, both, man and woman, are living in a shared and 'intersubjective world' with the other members (Pathak, 2006). One cannot imagine his existence without taking into account the behaviors of others. The consciousness, thoughts, feelings, and actions are situated in the matrix of social relationships one engaged in. In this

context, Mead's theoretical postulate about the man's 'self' arises in the process of social experience, and activity becomes relevant (Mead, 1934).

The globalization process has broadened and extended the realm of social identities like caste, class, gender, and religious identities. Now, individual shares an enlarged world of identities and the ethos and norm related to it. Sometimes, this expanded world stands at the contradictory point from that of the parochial world; however, sometimes it seems to reemploy the latter. In this process, the most concerned class is of youth as they are the active bearers of the global cultural and normative ethos. Gender, as a category of them, is also subjective to the ideologies and impacts of this process. The feminine gender is experiencing the new and modern dogmas of globalization. Therefore, the paper tries to interconnect the corollary of globalization as a process which is reflecting and imposing a more equalitarian gender norm, especially among the youth cultures.

There are multiple consequences and upshots of the process of globalization for youths. In the global world, Indian youth share a diversity of attitudes and perspectives of youth elsewhere and encounter multiple routes to entering and engaging with modernity. It has brought a profound transformation in the lives of youths including both women and men. The twentieth century saw an erosion of traditional segregated sex roles as women made considerable gains within the paid labor force, in educational opportunities, and in public life. Yet the force of this change varies substantially around the world, with significant contrasts among agrarian, industrial, and postindustrial societies. There are also substantial cross-national differences.

The demographic dividend of India offers an ideal location and a historical chance for society and polity to convert an unharnessed resource into a major societal asset. There is a positive association between the age composition of the Indian population and its economic growth. Indeed, demographers and economists have predicted higher growth prospects for India since the majority of the population is in the working age group. According to current estimates, India is and will remain for some time one of the youngest countries in the world. Exploring the attitudes and perspectives of India's young population, therefore, becomes as much an exercise of historical curiosity as it is a political necessity.

The role of globalization in transforming cultural attitudes towards gender equality, and the consequences of this process for women are diverse. Women's and men's lives have been altered in a two-stage modernization process. Firstly, the shift from agrarian to industrialized societies, reducing fertility rates, bringing women into the paid labor force, and increasing rates of literacy and education, and secondly, the move from industrial towards postindustrial societies, generating more substantial gains toward gender equality in the public sphere. The modern attitudes and aspirations carried by globalization process development are understood to underpin attitudinal change, although, at the same time, the pace of change is conditioned by the cultural legacy and institutional structure in any given society, such as the role of patriarchal structure, and the level of tolerance, etc.

Globalization has intensified the economic and technological growth that has brought a shift toward greater gender equality as women move into higher-status economic roles, for instance in greater participation in employment opportunities. The process of societal modernization is path-specific and is conditioned by the cultural heritage and structural context of a given society. On the contrary, the failure to adopt the new conditions created by the globalizing

process leads to a crisis of youth as increasing numbers of young people find it more difficult to gain education, access to health, a job, and meet their standard of living aspirations. Moreover, the process sets a standard or a model in terms of global culture, aspirations, and needs that are followed by a blind imitation of that ideal sculpt. Many youths, failing to cope with the new challenges feel deprived. This deprivation, sometimes, comes out as a dilemma or conflict with the self or with the 'ideal sculpt'.

The world is becoming more and more integrated. The greater trade openness is translating into growing global integration and interdependence, as transnational movements of people, culture, and ideas accelerate and information becomes ever more accessible. The greater access to information has allowed many in developing countries to learn about life and more in other parts of the world, including those about the role of women, possibly affecting attitudes and behaviors. A shift toward more egalitarian gender roles and norms has also been facilitated and, in some cases, reinforced by women's economic empowerment. But in the absence of public policy, globalization alone cannot and will not reduce gender inequality. Despite significant increases in agency and access to economic opportunities for many women in many countries, the rising tide has not lifted everybody. Globalization impacts young people in complex ways and forces them to constantly re-think and revise their sense of identity and place within society. Young people's lives are constantly being influenced by new trends, be they cultural, technological, or social.

In the process of globalization, looking at young women in the context of their everyday lives focuses upon the cultures of 'youthful femininities'. The products of globalized culture affect young women in particular ways. In negotiations with cultural globalization, the cultural commodities of global flows have been adopted as well as challenged within the texture of everyday lives by young women. It has facilitated a route where the 'performance of gender' can be in new ways. Young women's participation in the global cultural world indicates their participation in many opportunities like education and work etc. We contend that exploring young women's interactions with global culture is a means of 'troubling' the more parochial understandings of gender in late modernity.

"Globalization is said to offer young people possibilities for new forms of subjectivity and belonging, seemingly free from the immediate ties of family, peer group and geographic location" (Giddens, 1991 and Beck, 1992). Globalization, as a process, provides opportunities for the emergence of new feminine identities. The young women have been positioned as the ideal neo-liberal subjects for postindustrial times and it is marked by the reconfiguration of traditional gender roles (Carter, 2001). Nayak (2003) has emphasized that 'late modernity unshackles women from the patriarchal past'. They have been able to free themselves from a subordinated and subservient position where the male used to be the breadwinner. The new female can manage to be economically independent, liberated from the confines of the domestic sphere, and, with the help of new aspirations and opportunities.

The world has witnessed an enormous economic transformation over the past three decades, fostered by growing global flows of goods and services, technology, and information. These changes have transformed the way domestic and global markets and institutions function and have changed the economic landscape for youths. Taking

an illustration of agriculture can portray the picture comprehensively, for instance, women have moved out of agriculture and into manufacturing and particularly services. Young women are utilizing technology that in turn proves to be an empowering mechanism for them.

Indeed, the reality may be unfinished without taking into account the other side of the coin. For, when old gaps meet new trends, disadvantaged women are left farther behind. Women caught at the intersection of old gender gaps (in endowments, time availability, access to productive resources, and agency) and the new forces unleashed by globalization risk falling farther behind both men and women who have managed to benefit from trade openness, technological change, and access to information.

Beck discusses the issue of young people living and growing up in a world of risk and uncertainty (Beck, 1992; 2000). For example, the workplace is no longer a place of permanence with bonds of identity and loyalty and a sense of purpose. This uncertainty varies according to cultural and social contexts, leading to the question of whether many young people have the cultural and financial resources to offset the risks associated with these shifts toward a lack of stability in the workplace (Harvey, 2003).

Ray (2007) points out that 'globalization creates increased hybridism and differentiation, and overall a more complex and fluid world'. Living in a globalized world, he suggests, does not create homogeneity and polarization but rather a creative and diverse mix of identities. In the context of such a rapidly changing world, young people can find it challenging to construct social identities, particularly about the nature of education, cultural influences, and the needs of the labor market (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Globalization has also contributed to the expansion of the choices available to young people.

There is a tendency, often reinforced through opinion surveys involving young people, that considers the effects of globalization to be unstoppable, and that it is a process young people react to rather than actively negotiate (Harvey, 2003; MORI, 1998). Linked to this is an assumption that young people are merely passive recipients or vulnerable victims of global change. As Harvey (2003) has stated, 'Young people cannot control the speed or direction of social change, but they can and do have a say in the effect such change has on their lives'.

Although young people are not powerless concerning global change, their economic position is such that they are more vulnerable than many other social groups to the uncertainties and risks associated with economic and cultural globalization. Conversely, as already mentioned, young people are often at the forefront of technological and cultural changes that might be associated with globalization. Not surprisingly they are using the wide span of global media to express themselves.

Many young people have adopted a worldview in which the whole globe represents the key arena for social action (Mayo, 2005). However, being active is not necessarily the same as being powerful, and this is particularly true in the context of globalization. The rhetoric that might be associated with young people's citizenship in a global community generally does not match the reality. Young people are in one sense citizens of a global culture but at the same time struggle for a sense of acceptance in the local societies in which they live. For youth, this is the ultimate paradox of globalization (*ibid*).

Gender has been increasingly acknowledged as a critical variable in every process of development and change, thus, globalization is no more an exception. Gender is an expression of power in social relationships between men and women. Gender as a power relation derives from institutional arrangements which provide men of a given social group, with greater capacity than women from that social group to mobilize institutional rules and resources to promote and defend their interests. Though not a homogeneous group by way of caste, class, or economic activity, discrimination, and disparity connect women irrespective of the heterogeneity. Particularly, young women suffer from a lack of opportunity to work, low and discriminatory wages, and exploitative conditions resulting in casualization. They lack social security, face occupational health hazards, and do not have access to new technologies, skills, and knowledge. Therefore, globalization puts a challenge and risk as well as an opportunity for young women to be in the process and gain in the process.

Therefore, the global world has created femininities of youths as a gendered performance that is idealized in the global-modern context. The explorations of global connections by young women provide the wider landscape for social change. To extend beyond the ‘spatially bounded practice of institutional approaches’ the cultural and ideological spread of global society can be affirmative towards changing the stereotypes. Various global products like technology, media, economy, and modern-rational ideas can create and give a new meaning to youthful femininity. Recent trends also show that global media cultures play an integral part in young women’s lives and are an essential resource for creating meanings, shaping identities, and forging relationships.

Through an engagement with the flow of cultural signs and material objects, young women appropriate, adapt, and subvert globally marketed versions of femininity. Globalization has dramatically influenced social life in India. Many scholars argue that globalization has been detrimental to women due to growing structural gender inequalities; however, many identify greater opportunities to challenge preexisting patriarchal norms through the role models available in the globalized media.

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