



LIBERALIZATION IN INDIA AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN LABOUR

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Abstract: *The modern global marketplace is characterized by a high degree of monopolization. The sectors of the economy in which women majority traditionally participated have changed dramatically in recent years. Gender inequality in terms of the accessibility of resources, has become more acute, and women's security and the protection of their labor rights have become considerably worse. The socioeconomic situation and gender-neutral policies create specific barriers that obstruct women's successful political and professional careers. But on the other hand there are many areas where new employment opportunities for women have been created without loss for anyone else.*

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Liberalization of the world economy creates new opportunities to take full advantage of the market economy. The trade policies of national governments and the activities of the World Trade Organization have a significance influence on the economic and social development in the world. The modern global marketplace is characterized by a high degree of monopolization. It is very difficult for the developing countries to access these markets. Such countries are unable to compete for trade due to serious domestic political and economic problems. The transformational processes underway in the country have greatly influenced the development of gender equality. As a result of neo-liberal economic policy, restructuring has taken place in various fields of the economy. The implementation of a macroeconomic policy that did not consider social factors brought about a sharp decrease of social guarantees and a mass exodus of women from production facilities. The sectors of the economy in which women majority traditionally participated have changed dramatically in recent years. Gender inequality in terms of the accessibility of resources, has become more acute, and women's security and the protection of their labor rights have become considerably worse. The socioeconomic situation and gender-neutral policies create specific

barriers that obstruct women's successful political and professional careers.

The economic reforms launched in the country, the restructuring processes, and privatization have caused the polarization of the population into rich and poor strata. A social layer of entrepreneurs and private owners was formed, which, through the initiative of the state, appropriated privatized facilities. Great hopes were pinned on the privatization process, because it was believed that it would create new jobs, but all those hopes proved unfounded. Meanwhile, a huge number of unemployed persons was created, without any social guarantees. The sharp reduction in the number of jobs has caused the decrease of the demand for labor and the fewer employment options for men and women. On one hand, this can be explained by the fact that the traditionally "women's fields" (textile industries, food industry, chemical production, the social sphere, etc.) experienced the greatest negative effects as a result of the economic restructuring and trade liberalization in Georgia. Unemployment among women has reached a massive scale. Unfortunately, official statistics hardly reflect the existing reality.

Women's participation in the private sector is rather limited, and their labor rights are frequently

violated; in the current situation, chances for improvement of their material welfare are almost non-existent. Women take such work only for the sake of saving their families from starving. Unfortunately, due to scanty information, gender analysis of the private sector is very difficult, but disproportion between the sexes is still apparent in this sector. Violence against women in the workplace has become a serious problem. Because of the high rate of competition in the labor market, women are afraid of losing their jobs and therefore, in most cases, do not report abuse perpetrated against them. However, most Georgians are aware that such acts are committed in many offices and institutions. Prestigious and highly paid jobs, along with those in professional sectors create discriminatory requirements for women seeking employment, i.e. physical appearance requirements and age restrictions. In cases of pregnancy, it employers often deny women the privileges they are entitled to by law. All of these factors impede the involvement of women in the private sector. It should be emphasized that women have a lot to contribute to business, and it is detrimental to society when their participation in this sphere is limited. Equalizing the work opportunities of men and women requires a whole range of measures, such as credits with discounts, micro financing, improving legal protection of women's labor rights, etc.

In developing countries all over the world, women have had to move to a lower stage of the service infrastructure, and therefore the majority of them are obliged to work as nurses, shop assistants, waitresses, and in other unskilled positions. In the free economic zones of the countries of South Asia and Eastern Africa, women constitute 80 percent of the total labor force (cheap working force). Many women become victims of trafficking. More often women find the jobs not adequate to their qualification while being abroad, its subsequence is a total devaluation of value of women labor force. No guarantee for social protection is available for them. All above mentioned have had negative impacts on

women and families and was reflected in the demography situation and the devaluation of family values as well.

Globalization also tends to privilege large companies (in which the majority of employees are men) as they can capture new markets quickly and easily to the disadvantage of small and micro entrepreneurs (where women are the majority), which face difficulties gaining knowledge of and access to emerging markets. In sum, globalization puts pressure on low-skilled workers and petty producers by weakening their bargaining power and subjecting them to increasing competition. These trends have negative impacts on women, especially in the form of low wages, lack of benefits, and lack of security in the workplace.

Applying Liberalization entails many changes, opening of trade by reduction of import duties and removal of quantitative restrictions, a considerable loosening of the licensing systems, especially on the private sector of firms, as well as lifting of reservations for many products, and integration of production globally. These changes raised a wide debate on the effects of liberalization on the poor and on workers. Those who support liberalization say that there has been a decrease in poverty and an increase in general well-being, and those who oppose it saying that in fact poverty has increased, employment opportunities and access to social services have declined.

Economic opportunities created by the liberalization are highly unequal. Those with more access to skills, to markets, and with more resources or better links internationally have been able to benefit. For women at the upper-income, upper-skill end, the quality as well as opportunities for employment have improved. For most women workers however, the quality of employment is poor, without opportunities for skill development and moving up the ladder, and with very low income returns. Women are the most affected by the changes due to mechanization. The employment of manual workers is reduced and is displaced by workers who run the machines. In these cases the total number of

jobs is reduced drastically. Moreover, women are generally replaced by men. In the agricultural sector men have taken over from women those activities in which technology has substituted machinery for manual labour. All other labour intensive tasks are still left to women.

There are many areas where new employment opportunities for women have been created without loss for anyone else. Employment opportunities increase when there is opening of a new market or expansion of an existing market.

However even in sectors where liberalization has increased employment women workers are getting paid less than men and, in most cases, much below the minimum wage. Gender based wage disparities exist across all sectors and all occupations. Discrimination exists not only in terms of wages but also in terms of access to employment. Often women are found concentrated in occupations where the wage rates, as well as working conditions are poor and substandard.

With the coming of Globalization and liberalization, new technologies and fast changing markets tend to make existing skills obsolete and require up gradation, new skills and multi-skilling.

On the other hand it opens up new markets which workers can reach by adapting existing or traditional skills.

Women workers are usually at the lowest-paid end of any sector, they are usually termed as unskilled, even though very often their work, though low-paid, requires a certain level of technique. Often a woman's skills may not be regarded as skills at all, either by the person who is documenting the skills, or even by the women themselves.

Secondly, the potential marketability of a particular skill is never recognized. This refers to a woman's skills which currently may not be marketed but which may have a good market potential like embroidery or knowledge of herbs.

Liberalization of the Indian economy has dramatically influenced social life in India. It is argued that liberalization has been detrimental to women due to growing structural gender inequalities, but many respondents identify greater opportunities to challenge preexisting patriarchal norms through the role models available in the globalized media. While there are increasing inequalities for households, women do not consider these to be gender disadvantages, emphasizing instead the opportunities for greater independence.

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