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Gendered Aspects of Globalization

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ABSTRACT

We need to go beyond the accepted notions relating to the role of women in the economy and society, especially in terms of what is recognized in mainstream theory and policy as “work” done by women. Thus, the traditional gender roles, with the man as the breadwinner and the woman in the role of housekeeper, do not explain the contribution of women in general. We also need to go beyond standard models to interpret the intrahousehold gender inequities. We do not gain much insight from dwelling on the cooperative-conflict type of bargaining concepts either, which are offered in the literature to unfold the process of women’s subordination within households. The issues relate to the *intrahousehold power structure*, which has an inbuilt bias against female members under patriarchy.

In terms of a policy agenda, especially in the context of social and economic disparities that affect women in particular, we need to recognize not only the collective social norms but also the unequal power relations that influence the sexual division of labor, both within the family and in the workplace. A notion of “gendered moral rationality,” complemented by the Rawlsian concept of “justice as fairness” (implying compensation for the underprivileged), can be used to devise policy that addresses the status of women both in the workplace and at home. We need a concerted move toward sensitization of gender issues and scrutiny entailing a gender audit at every level of activity. This may work at least partially until society is ready to remodel itself by treating men and women equally.

Keywords: Gender; Justice; Feminization of Labor; Utilitarianism and Rationality; Households; Fair Exchange of Skills; Invisible Contribution; Social Reproduction

JEL Classifications: J12, J16, J17, J22, J31, J71

Gendered disparities and deprivations, common in most countries in terms of the formal jobs and facilities to avail of education and health services, are no longer viewed as a nonissue in academic discourses and official policy. However, it remains to be seen as to how effective these recognitions and concerns can be to redress the continuing gendered imbalances that even have aggravated today in different spheres of life.

It is important to notice that the sweeping economic reforms, which have taken place in a large number of developing and transition economies, have further contributed to these gender gaps. These disparities are also visible within households in terms of an uneven distribution of household resources and responsibilities. The changes in official policies with the launching of economic reforms have impacted formal jobs as well as households, with the curtailing of public expenditure on investments, food subsidies, education, health, transport, power, and even subsidized credit, to name a few. Reforms have also initiated new labor norms, encouraging a hire-and-fire policy on part of employers with a flexible labor policy, often viewed as a typical “feminization of labor” in the literature. With subcontracting and outsourcing of jobs at level of industry, flexibilization of labor has been a major tool of surplus expropriation on the part of employers. Privatization also has been a major tool of industrial restructuring, by helping employers to rationalize production process with capital-intensive methods of production, which cause increased unemployment, as well as casualization. Replacing the earlier stance of a developmental state, countries subject to the above path now follow a roadmap to market-led efficiency. One of its major consequences has been this additional stress on women, often between the responsibilities at home and at place of work. The burden gets aggravated with the steady squeeze of social sector expenditure by the state, as pointed out above, with open discrimination against women in the typically patriarchal society.

We introduce, in section I of the paper, the different theoretical approaches to gender-related issues as have come up in the literature. Section II dwells on the gender-related issues in the context of globalization.

I. ALTERNATE CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO GENDER ISSUES

In the literature, one witnesses diverse positions relating to issues on gender disparities in different countries. Using different methods of analysis, these policy prescriptions often tend to be very different from each other. It is possible to distinguish, among others, the following five strands in such analysis:

First, there remain the dominant neoliberal view relying on utilitarianism and rationality to explain gender status in society. Highlighting the role of “rational” men and women, it is argued that all of them, if left free (as in a free market), are capable of maximizing their respective utility, subject to a set of exogenously determined factors that include tastes and preferences, as well as asset holding. A mainstream approach as above provides the basis for free-market policies that can direct resources to achieve maximum efficiency and to distribute resources in proportion to individual contributions of individuals. Individual men as well as women, in terms of this principle, each get what they contribute in material terms in an *exchange economy*. In a full employment market economy, the end result takes the form of a Pareto optimum, with production, distribution, and consumption optimized at a maximum level. The outcome also lends a basis to the theory behind the current drives for liberalization under globalization.

A theory as above presumes that all are necessarily remunerated according to their individual contribution in material terms. This relies on the basic presumption that each individual in society will receive what they contribute in material terms to an exchange economy. *Doctrines as these have a natural tendency to altogether ignore or justify the gendered disparities.* For example, discriminations against females in the labor market (say, with limited access to jobs and/or lower wages as compared to men) are interpreted as rational decisions—of employers to hire and for workers to accept jobs at terms available in the market. Similarly, the relatively higher joblessness of women in the economy (as compared to those for men) is supposed to reflect the voluntary choice on the part of women to stay at home rather than to have a job outside. Women’s work in a formal capacity in the labor market and a rising female labor participation rate, are similarly viewed as voluntary decisions to work outside when the opportunity cost of staying at home goes up with rising wages (Mincer 1980).

Positions as above also have no concern for the uneven sharing of household chores by women, whether they work outside or stay at home. Nor do these pay any attention to the prevailing discrimination against working women in the formal labor market. As pointed out by A.K. Sen in his critique, an “efficiency-oriented” promotion of the maximum sum-total of utilities in the economy ignores altogether the inequalities and perception issues relating to gendered aspects (Sen 1995).

Attention can also be drawn to one more conceptual position on the status of women. While seeking to accommodate gender dimensions, it continues to rely on the same set of conventional mainstream theories. It addresses the gender-wise division of labor, especially

within households, by relying on what is described as a “fair exchange of skills.” Theories as above justify a sexual division of labor across the gender divide. Mainstreaming the gender roles, it comes close to what has come to be known as harmonious “unitary models” of household economics of the Gary Becker (1981) variety. Describing man as the provider and woman as the nurturer, the partners in a marriage, with full mutual consent, are considered to be engaged in what is described above as “fair trade” in exchange of skills. The joint utility maximization of individuals at the level of families (treated as a unit), as held in these theories, rationalizes the decisions of both men and women in the context of marriages, and even in fertility choices on part of both partners.

By postulating free rational choice, the Beckerian version of gender economics is subject to a total neglect of patriarchy prevailing within households. As in the mainstream utilitarian approaches, there is an implicit assumption that the typical feminine activities within (and even outside) the households do not have any worth as a meaningful “economic activity.”

Coming to alternative theoretical formulations on gender gaps, thanks to new household economics, the “visibility of women” was finally discovered by a group of researchers during the 1980s (Jain and Banerjee 1985). These theories introduced debates (and not a total neglect) on what was identified as “domestic labor.” Highlighting the role of “economically active labor,” which includes the role of women in “social reproduction,” these theories brought to the fore the “invisible contribution” of women in the care economy at the level of households. However, deviating from approaches where households are treated as units, feminists in this group with Marxist leanings point out the links between unpaid social reproduction process (at the level of households) to capitalist surpluses earned therefrom (Mackintosh 1973). It is argued that work done by women within households enables capitalists to save on the cost of subsistence for workers, and thus to earn a larger surplus. In absence of such supports, as argued in these theories, the capitalists could find it difficult to sustain the labor force at the market rate of wages (which often falls below subsistence at level of family). Arguing further, the supply of female labor has been viewed as a function of labor-saving techniques (e.g., water grids, electricity), as well as of family support within households, the latter responsible for providing the biological and social reproduction process of the labor force (Beneria 1985). From this angle, the growth of an economy (not just actual, but also potential, which is distinct from static measures of GDP) seems to depend on a wider notion of labor participation by recognizing the role of women in the maintenance and reproduction of the labor force (Walters 1995). However, other Marxist feminists have

rejected even those positions, arguing that it fails to recognize social reproduction and gender inequities under patriarchy (Mackintosh 1978).

It is now generally recognized, at least at level of feminist and other civil society discourses, that the traditional gender roles that incorporate the intrahousehold responsibilities of women provide significant contributions to economy and society. These contributions to GDP are no less than what all can be accounted for by counting on their contributions against paid work, which is usually outside home. However, while the biological and social reproduction of the family members generally remain women's responsibility, households are often subject to extremely rigid hierarchies in terms of work. The role and double burden of women at level of households continue to be socially undervalued, even when they enter the formal job market. Thus, a mere recognition of gender gaps in society, if it fails to counter the pervading stereotypes of patriarchy, does not serve much purpose in redressing the gender balance that pervades official policies as well as social norms.

The contribution of women in terms of their unpaid work in the economy, as pointed out above, remains ignored in mainstream theory, and thus in the accepted policy and related standard statistics on national accounts. As pointed out, "...labor markets are gendered institutions which ... operate at the intersection of productive and reproductive economy. They operate in ways that fail to acknowledge the contributions of the reproductive economy" (Elson 1994).

We now dwell on one more variant of the gender divide conceptualizations, dwelling on what is described as "cooperative conflicts" at level of households. In a model generated by A.K. Sen in 1990, a "collective household" (as distinct from the Beckerian "unitary") model was used for the first time. It developed the notion that decisions taken at level of households reflect both the collective desire to further the cause of the household while trying to achieve individual goals, and the two are often subject to conflicts with each other (Sen 1990).

Models as above on potential conflicts and bargaining in intrahousehold gender relations, however, are distinct from the standard game-theoretic models. In absence of a "perception" relating to the continuing inequalities, these models explain the intrahousehold discords in terms of the socially accepted norms of the gender divide. Inequalities within households include the disparities in educational opportunities, the lower life expectation of women (contrary to what is biologically expected), and the limited access to resources including land, inheritance, and even credit. A.K. Sen (1993) further specifies the issue by

pointing at the limited “capability” of women, where “capability” is interpreted as the “freedom” to choose the way of life that defines “human liberation” or development. Introducing the notion of “agency” as a route to “empowerment” of women,¹ A.K. Sen speaks of the role of women in their ability to use agencies for earning. A list is provided in Martha Nussbaum’s work to spell out “capability.” These range from physical needs (for health and other requirements) to cultural and social prerequisites, all of which are relevant in achieving a life that is also “human” (Nussbaum 2007).

A few problems, as pointed out by others, remain when one tries to explain gender relations by using the cooperative conflict models of intrahousehold issues. As pointed out, a cooperative solution can sometimes be generated by a desire on part of women to compromise in order to achieve peace rather than enter into conflicts. In such situations women hardly exercise any amount of authority (Krishnaraja 2006). Similarly, the “agency” role of women may not be sufficient to empower them, say in the control over their earnings from jobs. The “agency role,” as a policy tool for empowerment in terms of facilities for education may also turn out as to be of little use in liberating women.²

We also want to point out that the discriminations at a point of time, as well as the remedial actions as are offered to redress the gender related inequities, are hardly independent of the experiences that women face as individuals in the context of the specific situations. Those are specific to time, class, and caste, as well as the race to which they relate to. From this angle the challenge is still there—to construct a gender-based theoretical analysis that takes care of these specific differences, while providing a generalized framework in which women in general can identify themselves.

We notice that there exist, in the literature on gender-related aspects relating to the economy and society, two distinct strands, each addressing gender-related issues of deprivation and discrimination. The *first* addresses their limited access to the formal job market and other similar hindrances in the so-called free markets for credit, land, and other resources. The *second* concerns the prevailing biases against women as human beings in the context of intrahousehold and off-household issues. It is not difficult to see the point of convergence between the two in highlighting the unequal status of women at their formal workplace, as well as within the family, often reinforcing each other. However, as we

¹ Here the argument differs from the Rawlsian theory of justice, which emphasizes the availability of basic or primary goods as the “means” to achieve fairness in social relations. The notion of “capability” recognizes commodities as an “end” rather than as a means to achieve gendered freedom.

² Thus, education of women may be viewed as useful in terms of education of her child, reduced fertility, or supplementary source of income for family rather than a force to liberate her from patriarchy; see Krishnaraj (2006).

mention above, the literature still is at a formative stage, especially in suggesting policies that redress the imbalance in terms of a changed social order.

II. GENDER AND GLOBALISATION

Analysis of gender issues demands a scrutiny of the information as is available on the status of women in different spheres of life and activity, in formal and informal capacities. Much has been written and researched on these issues, generating data sets on what is described as “gender gaps” relating to job opportunities, wages, and other terms of employment including tenure, leave rules, benefits, etc. As for the Indian scene, most often the available statistics relate to the formal-sector jobs of women, thus leaving out the vast unorganized sector where gender gaps can be even more pronounced. By identifying “work” as formal jobs outside home, the data tends to leave out a vast area of unenumerated contributions, especially of women, both in an informal capacity outside/inside the home and in their domestic responsibilities.

In terms of the conventional mainstream approach to gender roles, a rise in the formal entry of women in the labor force is sometimes treated in the literature as a typical masculinization process, with more of the female labor force achieving a labor force participation status that is otherwise associated with men (Elson 1995). In these doctrines, women workers are treated as inferior to men, which is supposed to be reflected in the lower wages as well as the inferior terms of work that they are given as compared to men in the labor market.

Mainstream economics dwells on the gains expected, for men as well as women, when markets are opened up with liberalization and expansions in trade, as well as with FDI from abroad. Both trade and FDI, in terms of the argument, generate opportunities of labor-intensive, low-wage, low-skill employment that usually absorbs more women. In general, the opening up of market for imports, drive for exports, and foreign investment flows are supposed to generate a greater degree of cost-competitiveness with labor market flexibility, which suit industry. Jobs as are provided to women, including home-based ones with outsourcing and subcontracting, typically create the related “double burden” for women. Concerns on part of industry for cost reduction in uncertain markets reflect the tendencies for relocation on part of foreign controlled units, e.g., with Maquiladora shifting out from Mexico to China laying off 160 thousand workers in 2001–02. The temporary and exploitative nature of the new jobs, with discrimination at the entry-point, as well as against

upward mobility, often make it apparent that having skill and education does not help to reduce the wage gap between men and women. Gender gaps in terms of job opportunities, as well as status within households, are also adversely affected by the downsizing of the public sector since it weakens labor rights and job security aspects while cutting back social sector spending. The double burden of women continues and grows as women take underpaid jobs outside while cuts in public spending to the social sector add to their domestic work. The situation as above has happened in many developing countries including in India in terms of the ongoing pace of economic reforms and liberalization.

Gender gaps in employment, conditions of work, and in wages, operating at three levels, combine in complex ways to produce a vicious circle of gendered discrimination. These include: (a) an absence of societal and household sanction to improve the skill formation of women; (b) the social disapproval of opportunities for wider economic participation; and (c) gender discrimination at both the entry point and in terms of upward mobility in employment (Papola and Sharma 1999). The process is set in motion by the parental perception of low returns on the investment in education of a girl-child. This results in low levels of skill formation among women, with their job-openings restricted to low-paid ones due to lack of education.

Dwelling on the macroeconomic issues relating to employment of women in the context of globalization, we need to look at, in addition to their participation in the labor force, the quality of those jobs and the work-related environment, which includes remuneration and other terms, as well as the extent of family support in terms of the sharing of household responsibilities. The wave of deregulation under globalization has introduced labor market “flexibility,” which, in the fragmented, low-wage labor markets of developing countries, has initiated new forms of expropriation of female labor. With labor rights perceived of as a cost of production by investors, uncertain export (as well as domestic) markets generate a desire to press for labor market flexibility. The change in labor market policies was often a sequel to the Fund-Bank structural adjustment programs implemented in these developing countries. The consequences include the erosion of protective and procollective labor regulations, decentralization of wage determination, end of employment security, and a trend towards market-based regulation rather than statutory regulation of the labor market (Standing 2002). These policies also squeeze expenditure by the state under social heads, with markets expected to provide similar services, which turns out to be both inadequate and iniquitous. Inequities, as above, go with jobs in the workplace as well as at home, the latter often with the dual responsibility.

As for the job-expansionary effects that women are expected to experience from liberalization of trade and FDI inflows under economic reforms, there is no evidence of a reduced gender gap in job opportunities and wages in the high-export growth “newly industrialized countries” (NIE) Asian economies. Recent statistics of female employment share shows a decline for these countries and for Thailand. In a large number of countries in Africa, women were displaced in the job market with labor flexibility, which incidentally has been an attractor of FDI in the labor-intensive units. The above has further weakened the bargaining power of women, if any, in those lines of production even when they are absorbed in larger numbers. Moreover, gains in terms of job openings in the export-oriented industries may turn out to be temporary in units controlled by FDI, as can be seen from the relocation of “maquila” flows from Mexico to China during 2001–02, with a loss of 160,000 jobs. A major share of above was borne by women (UNRISD 2005). Finally the wage-gap has been observed to be more in low-wage, labor-intensive sectors with the wage gap between men and women often exceeding the respective skill gap. Thus higher skill has not been rewarding women appropriately in terms of higher wages (UNRISD 2005). It has been observed in the context of Caribbean economies that “...women need higher levels of educational attainments than men to compete for jobs, decision-making positions and access to an equal share of productive resources” (UNRISD 2005).

Generalizing, the gender dimension of shifts in labor market processes in developing countries under globalization can be traced to the following three distinct channels.

(a) Globalization through cost-cutting competitiveness, which, in absence of other routes like cuts in nonlabor input costs, has motivated a search for ways of lowering labor cost by implementing labor flexibility. Firms therefore are more ready to employ workers if they are prepared to accept low-wage jobs. As a consequence a growing number of jobs come up without regular wages, benefits, and employment protection. These have resulted in a substantial rise in subcontracting, in the growth of ancillary small-scale units, and in home-based manufacturing production which are at the bottom of a complex production chain. Putting-out arrangements and just-in-time production methods have emerged as newer, flexible forms of labor use. These widespread organizational changes with informalization of employment reflect the characteristics as are typical in employment of women. These include irregular labor force participation, willingness to work for lower wages as compared to men, and, finally, jobs that need no upgrading of technical skills (Standing 1999). In India the

gender-related discrepancies are exacerbated by the fact that the labor force in the country is growing fast.

(b) The downsizing of public sector employment, downplaying of labor rights, and job security requirements, along with higher insecurities of private sector employment under globalization, have affected both men and women. However, since women are concentrated at the lower end of the job spectra, these tend to hurt women more than men. This aspect is evident in limited access to jobs and rising unemployment, increase in wage differentials among men and women, and greater concentration of women in low paid sectors.

(c) An “additional work effect” often operates at the level of households, with women pushed to take up underpaid jobs in the formal/informal labor market. The above is related to the high prices of essentials, reduced level of social security, and the instabilities in male earnings as are related to insecure jobs. Often these formal/informal job contracts outside home put added pressure on women who, per force, continue with their traditional roles within the household. In a forceful argument presented in a paper, the notion of “paid work” as a means to “freedom” (as in A.K. Sen) has been questioned, pointing out that such opportunities may coexist with the uneven (and double) burden of household responsibilities along with the dominance of male members (father/husband or even son) in controlling the income earned by females (Koggel 2006). It is also pointed out that with advances of multinational corporations (MNCs) and the use of subcontracting with outsourcing, global forces of power and local forces of oppression operate to interact, often repressing the female workers. As pointed out by a scholar in the context of the operation of maquiladoras in Mexico, “...increasing women’s freedom through work outside the home can fail as a general policy if preexisting local conditions are disadvantageous. This is particularly likely when MNCs can prevent workers from organizing, challenging, and changing oppressive and exploitative work conditions” (Fussel 2000). Given the rather doubtful quality of formal work in such cases and the equally oppressive workload at home, it is thus necessary to ensure that paid work does not represent a distress strategy to sustain family livelihood.

Official statistics in most countries with its rather inadequate enumeration process, has an implicit gender bias against the role of women, e.g., in the notion of what constitutes “work.” As a consequence, only the outcome (e.g., earning, expenditure, wealth, work, occupation, etc.) is usually taken note of, to the neglect of the social relations behind the labor process and, in particular, vis-à-vis the household care economy. The outcome has been identified as a “cultural construct,” shaping attitudes to gender disparities both at the workplace and in intrahousehold relations (Beneria 1985). It is now recognized that the process impacts the status of women in terms of the “missing” numbers, with adverse sex ratios in terms survival which goes against the better biological sustenance and also with deprivations in terms of the usual gender development indices which include education, health, and related matters (A.K. Sen in Nussbaum and Glower [1995: 259–73]).

Points raised above do not belittle the gender biases in the formal labor market, which even gets intensified under the flexible labor policies. Gendered wage gaps and worsening terms of employment, including the distribution of benefits like social security and maternity rights, are some of those aspects. Official statistics on gender gaps in employment and wages fail to highlight those aspects of gender deprivation in the labor market and at workplaces, as well as within households. *Thus, the relational characteristics between the two sexes, which include hierarchy, dependence, and power in patriarchy, are left outside the purview of economics, the data set, and the policies generated there from.*

In addition, we need to pay attention to the following aspects that are relevant in the context of a study of the gendered aspects of globalization:

- Expansions in exports and inflows of foreign direct investments (FDI) generate jobs in low-wage, labor-intensive products that absorb more women.
- Disapproval at level of society and family for achieving skill and education for girls, especially with concerns for dowry and patriarchy.
- Need to reject the prevailing attitude to women’s contribution, at the level of the formal workplace, market-based access to resources, and the household. To identify the **power-relations as continue to deprive women at different levels of livelihood.** Need for **social accountability** in terms of the contribution of women in economy and society.
- Need to have a general approach to the gender question and the deprivations as are relevant for women who are different in terms of time, race, class, and caste relations.

- Need to fill-in the relevant information and to sensitize both men and women in households to make them aware of the issue.

Summing up, we need to go beyond the accepted notions relating to the role of women in the economy and society, especially in terms of what is recognized in mainstream theory and policy as “work” done by women. Thus, the traditional gender roles with man as the breadwinner and the woman in the role of the housekeeper do not explain the contribution of women in general. We also need to go beyond models of the Beckerian variety to interpret the intrahousehold gender inequities. We do not have much insight either by dwelling on the cooperative-conflict type of bargaining concepts either, as in the literature to unfold the process of intrahousehold subordination of women or tensions. The issues relate to the *intrahousehold power structure* which has an inbuilt bias against female members under patriarchy.

As for an agenda in terms of policy, especially in the context of the prevailing social and economic disparities, as well as distress, we need to recognize the collective social norms as well as the unequal power relations that influence the sexual division of labor, both within the family as well as at the work place. A notion of “gendered moral rationality,” complemented with the Rawlsian “justice as fairness” (implying compensation for the underprivileged) can be used to devise policy, which concerns the status of women both at the work place and beyond, covering the space at home (Rawls 1971).³ A concerted move to have widespread sensitization of gender issues and a scrutiny with gender audit may serve some of the above purpose until society is ready to remodel itself by treating men and women at an equal level.

³ Incidentally, the notion of “gendered moral rationality” has been used in the literature in the context of poverty, famine, and hunger. It indemnifies the costs/sacrifices unduly borne by sections of society including women. See A.K Sen and John Williams (1982) and O’Neill (1986).

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