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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: A STUDY OF PRIS IN GANJAM DISTRICT <i>DR. URMALA DAS & SARBANI SANKAR PANIGRAHI</i>	1
2.	MICRO-CREDIT THROUGH REGIONAL RURAL BANKS (RRBs)-A CASE STUDY OF SAPTAGIRI GRAMEENA BANK WITH FOCUS ON CHITTOOR DISTRICT <i>K. RAMANAMMA & DR. P. MOHAN REDDY</i>	6
3.	ROLE OF PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IN URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE: A CASE STUDY ON WEST BENGAL STATE IN INDIA <i>DR. MANAS CHAKRABARTI</i>	10
4.	INNOVATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER AS SOURCES OF EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE TRANSFORMATION BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE VOLVO GROUP <i>DR. JOANNA PRYSTROM & DR. KATARZYNA WIERZBICKA</i>	16
5.	A FACTOR ANALYSIS OF PRODUCT ELEMENTS FOR CONSUMER BUYING PATTERN OF MALE GROOMING PRODUCTS IN SURAT CITY <i>TANVI B. BHALALA & GAUTAM DUA</i>	24
6.	RISK MANAGEMENT IN THE BANKS: AN ANALYSIS <i>KAJLEEN KAUR</i>	29
7.	PASSENGER EXPECTATIONS ON DOMESTIC AIRLINE SERVICES: AN ANALYSIS <i>DR. P. BABY</i>	39
8.	INNOVATIVE LEARNING PEDAGOGY IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS <i>RESHMA K. TIWARI</i>	44
9.	APPRAISAL OF INDIA'S LUXURY MARKET <i>AAKRITI CHAUDHRY</i>	48
10.	ROLE OF MICRO FINANCE IN OVERALL DEVELOPMENT OF SHGs <i>DR. K. EKAMBARAM & DR. JMJ.VINODINI</i>	53
11.	CUSTOMERS PERCEPTION TOWARDS HOUSING LOAN: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO STATE BANK OF INDIA IN MAYILADUTHURAI TOWN <i>DR. K. KALIDOSS & A. RAVIKUMAR</i>	62
12.	A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RISK AND RETURN: A CASE STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO IT, TELECOM & AUTO SECTOR COMPANIES <i>NEERAJ GUPTA & DR. DEEPIKA SINGH TOMAR</i>	65
13.	PERFORMANCE OF LAND PURCHASE PROGRAMME IN KARNATAKA: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SC's AND ST's <i>DR. RAJAMMA .N</i>	72
14.	GLOBALISATION AND RURAL WOMEN IN INDIA: A CRITICAL EVALUATION <i>ABDUL SAAD KHAN & MOHAMMAD ZIA</i>	75
15.	WEBSITE USAGE FOR IMPROVED GREEN MARKETING COMMUNICATION <i>PRASHANT KUMAR</i>	77
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK & DISCLAIMER	83

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GLOBALISATION AND RURAL WOMEN IN INDIA: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

In developing countries like India, agriculture is considered to be the backbone of economy and women play a pivotal role in agriculture. There is a greater involvement of women under agricultural operations along with household responsibilities. It is an estimation that about 70% of the farm activities are carried out by women. Unfortunately their role is never appreciated, though women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including in the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/ social forestry, fisheries, etc. With India changing nature of its economy and opening it to the world, the condition of rural agrarian women worsened. The study of impact of globalisation on women is important because they represent almost half the population. The policy of globalisation loses its significance if women are not benefited as they are the integral part in the process of economic development. This paper analyses the changing patterns of gender inequality and problems faced by rural agrarian women in the post-reform era. The paper is divided into four parts. The first part of the paper gives a brief introduction about the role played by the women in Indian agriculture. Second part throws light on the status of rural agrarian women in India. The third part critically evaluates the impact of globalisation on status of rural women in India. And the last part comes up with conclusion and recommendations based on the evaluation.

KEYWORDS

globalisation, rural women, agriculture, economic development, gender inequality.

INTRODUCTION

What actually comes to our mind when we think of a farmer? The image blinks is that of a man; this is the first sign of discrimination that we show towards those hardworking women in fields who actually contribute in higher proportions in farm activities than man. The prosperity of a developing country like India depends on the status and development of women who not only constitute the half of the population but also affect the other half. It has been a matter of research and investigation about the role of women in social production. Indian rural women not only have the responsibility of managing the household but also to manage the fields and cattle. The notion of work and employment for women is a complex issue. If we talk about the role of rural women in agriculture their role range from producers of staple foods such as rice, wheat and corn to keepers of seeds as well as indigenous farming knowledge and practices. In addition to this they not only take care of household but also breed livestock and poultry. In developed countries the agriculture is managed by small numbers of men because it is mechanised; except Japan where mechanised operations are carried out by women.¹ In India about 71.79 percent of entire female workforce lives in rural areas,² but the involvement of women in agricultural operation vary from region to region. The nature and extent of their work depends on multiple factors like social, cultural, economic and personal, but with the opening up of the Indian economy to the world another important factor which affects the working and employment pattern along with social status of rural women in India.

STATUS OF RURAL AGRARIAN WOMEN IN INDIA

In the Himalayas a pair of bulls works for 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on a 1 hectare farm.³ In India the typical work of a female in agricultural field is limited to unskilled jobs such as sowing, transplanting, weeding etc. the status of women in any civilization shows stage of evolution at which the civilization has arrived. The term status includes not only personal or proprietary rights but also duties, liabilities and disabilities. A typical day for a woman in an agricultural position lasts from 4 am to 8 pm with only one hour break in middle. Most women are overworked with no maternity leave or special breaks.

As per FAO estimates, women produce 60 to 80 percent of foods in most of the developing countries and are responsible for world's half food production. The nature of work done by men and women on fields are different, in general, men undertake the heavy physical labour of land preparation and jobs which are specific to distant locations, such as livestock herding, while women carry out the time-consuming tasks like weeding and those which are located close to home, such as care of the kitchen garden. Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that it was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fibre and fuel. Women have played and continue to play a key role in the conservation of basic life support systems such as land, water, flora and fauna. In India the labour force is largely masculine, with only one out of every four workers being a female. Women today play a pivotal role in agriculture - as female agricultural labour, as farmers, co-farmers, female family labour and (with male out-migration, widowhood, etc.) as managers of farms and farm entrepreneurs. The nature of work done by agricultural female workers varies from season to season.

Nisha N (2008) in her study conducted on "Woman labour in agriculture- An economic analysis" finds that the woman labour got maximum employment in agriculture during *kharij* season. The labourers got maximum number of days of employment in weeding followed by harvesting and postharvest operations. The woman labour had maximum unemployed days in summer as this is the off season for agriculture in the study area which compelled the woman labourers to seek employment opportunities like NREGS activities, construction work, tile making etc. The study also comes to the conclusion that woman unemployment in agriculture has caused a severe impact on the income of labourers, family expenditures, and their saving and debt position. It also caused migration of labourers to other activities and places. Increase workforce participation rates do not always indicates increase in the level of welfare. So it must be accompanied by higher educational capabilities and asset and income. A number of studies conducted earlier accepted the failure on the side of Indian society to acknowledge

¹ Satyavathi Tara C., et al, Role of Farm Women in Agriculture, Gender Technology and Development, 2010

² Census of India 2011

³ Sustainable Development Department, Food and Agriculture Organization, World Trade organization, 2010.

the multiple contributions of women to rural survivals. Women do not enter the labour market in equal terms with men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints, gender bias in labour market and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport and accommodation in the formal sector of the formal labour market. Chattopadhyay Manabendu (1982) finds in his analysis that while the male labourers are paid in cash or kind or both or even in the form of share of a crop, payment to the female labour where there is exclusively female employment are made in the form of kind or in terms of "cash and kind."

IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON RURAL WOMEN IN INDIA

The term globalization was used for the first time in the journal Economist. Globalization is a word whose meaning is different to different people. For some it is a synonym to global business, for some it is the integration to global market. Ratner (1997) defined globalization as "a world system in which powerful, interconnected, stateless corporations nullify national boundaries and incorporate whole societies as cost-effective sites of production." Globalization or free trade and privatization have brought about many positive and negative impacts on rural development. Rural Indian women have faced several problems in her life with a little respite. But the situation created by globalization is more diverse and affect all aspects of rural women's life. It has not only affected the quantity of work done by Indian rural women but also the quality. The traditional rural economy is the hardest hit by globalization and women who are the integral part of that are the major sufferer. The traditional role of women in agriculture and allied activities including small scale industries, handicrafts and handlooms have been undermined because of mechanisation and automation and prevalent market based economy. Another major impact of globalization is increased industrialization and urban conglomeration which has increased the migration of male labourers from rural to urban centres. This male migration has tripled the burden on rural women i.e. that of home maker, farmer and bread-winner. The migration is not only limited to the male labourers but there are instances where there is female migration. This migration of female has raised concerns about women security as there is an increase in cases of trafficking and exploitation of women.

Globalization has allowed the MNCs to enter into areas like food processing and other small scale sectors which were a main source of employment to semi-skilled and unskilled women labourers. It is evident that open market policies has led to price-rise in food and other basic necessities, ultimately it is the women who has to deal with the changing level of expenditure.

The aim of this study is not to highlight the negative impact of globalisation on rural agrarian women but to highlight the issues that are the side effects of a major change in policy that is intended to bring equality and welfare. There are welcome changes brought by the policies of globalization and privatization. With the world companies coming to India there are wider working opportunities not only for the working force but also to the women who are becoming a large part of the workforce. This in turn will be providing equality between men and women, something that Indian women had been struggling for their entire lives. Globalisation has the power to uproot the traditional status of women in India specially the rural India.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summing up the discussion so far it is very clear that the negative impacts of globalization on rural women in India are much more deep rooted than the positive one. Another important thing is that India has to continue on the path of globalisation so there is need to address the women issues especially of rural women. Due to illiteracy and unawareness the rural women is subjected to exploitation. Although in the view of globalisation and New Economic Policies there are ample opportunities in the upcoming time for both men and women and this will reduce the gender discrimination. Hence we can say that globalisation definitely plays an important role in the life of women but it only addresses the issues of wage and employment but plays a negative role in upgrading the status of women in rural areas. In addition it may have a multiplying effect of recession on life of a common house-wife. Combating such issues is the utmost responsibility of government as Indian constitution states that India is a welfare state. Some steps that could be taken in order to improve the status of rural women and also to minimise the ill effect of globalization are:

1. To strengthen the rural women by providing them proper training for better survival in adverse conditions of life.
2. Encourage savings among rural women and making them a priority in the process of financial inclusion.
3. Providing proper training and making them skilled not only in agricultural and allied activities but also in non-agricultural activities.
4. Providing rural women proper credit facilities so that they can start their own enterprise.
5. Increasing awareness and literacy among rural women regarding women safety and women rights.
6. Encouraging rural women to educate their children especially girl child.

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