Globalization and the New Middle Class of India

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ABSTRACT

Post globalization, India underwent a rapid change not only in terms of human development but also in its economic, cultural, and social ethos. Keeping in view the diversity of Indian society, the present article seeks to demonstrate the significant transformation of its emerging new middle class (NMC) vis a vis its constructive response and resilience. The article analyses the emergence and ongoing transformation of the NMC family with reference to its economic and socio-cultural distinctiveness, in the backdrop of the mid-1980s and the 1990s neo-liberalization. In this decade, the confident and ambitious NMC consisting of about 300-400 million people, has sprouted up across the country and is increasing rapidly. Since a sizable majority of the NMC are transnational and globally represents Indian diaspora in the UAE, the USA, Europe, and a few other countries, therefore there is an urgent need to effectively engage with the NMC family both in India and abroad through scholarly attention and active engagement. Undoubtedly, the family plays a significant role in overall human development and society's well-being, hence the article focuses upon the inclusive and holistic human development of the NMC family in the context of globalization. However, the trajectory of the ongoing NMC transformation poses some serious challenges to the institution of the family and demands appropriate attention and substantial changes.

KEYWORDS: New Middle Class, Transnational Ethos, Globalization.

Introduction

The focus of this article, the New Middle Class (NMC) family, is a category not so easy to describe or delineate, especially at this time of rapid transformations that mark the post-liberalization era along with globalization. Today, globalization is a dominant driving force and is profoundly "restructuring the social order around the world, and families are the center of this change" (Trask 2010: v). Indeed, globalization is transforming the family, their development, and the institution of family is taking a new diversion due to its impact.

While studying the linkages between globalization and the NMC family, the purpose of this article is to gauge the role of globalization in altering the NMC family institutio and its related human development. The size of the NMC has significant repercussions as it is directly connected with India's economic growth and sustainability. Indeed, they constitute a sizeable portion of the global workforce, particularly in IT and related industries that have created new benchmarks for their identity, influence, and global-local exchange. The subject of an Indian family in its comprehensiveness is quite complicated as the Indian family roots are deeply ingrained in vast and complex. religious pedigrees and ancient traditions. Therefore, it is a herculean task to study all aspects in a single article. Therefore, the focus of the present study is limited to the impact of

globalization on the key aspects of the NMC family and not the entire family institution with all related issues viz. interpersonal, religious, social, cultural, and legal manifestations.

The NMC in India

The concept of "middle class" is not recent in origin. Aristotle, "during his era (389 BC- 322 BC), had used the term "middle class" and designated it to be central for the very continuation of society" (Pandey, 2009). However, the development of India's middle- class was initiated by the British rule and subsequent introduction of English education endorsed by the colonial era. The implementation of Macaulay's policy of advancement of western education in English contributed significantly to the growth of the middle classes in India (Pandey, 2009). However, in the contemporary period, which is the focus of the present study, the "new" middle class, is represented as a social group, which is negotiating India's present relationship globally, in both cultural and economic terms (Fernandes, 2000). It is important to first acknowledge that the modern middle class is not a homogenous group. It is disjointed by social position and ideology on the one hand and earnings and occupation on the other (Upadhya, 2004). Madhukar Sabnavis suggests that the Indian middle class is anywhere between 300 to 400 million and growing continuously (2010). According to Zoya Hasan, "A broader definition suggests that the middle class in India is approximately a fifth of its 1.2 billion people. The absolute numbers are still very sizeable" (2013).

The size and definition of the middle class are a matter of debate and is dependent on several aspects such as income, status, identity, power, consumption, occupation, and lifestyle. Therefore, there is no unified definition of India's middle class. Various sociologists define the middle class in India in different ways. However, most definitions are generally based on a combination of income, education, wealth and occupation and sometimes even on consumerism, and one's influence in society. The "newness" of this Indian middle class is a culturally oriented and is marked by attitude, lifestyle and consumption practices associated with trends in the construction of the "new rich" (Beng-Huat 2000; Robison and Goodman 1996). As a social group, it is the prime beneficiary of globalization in contemporary Asia (Fernandes, 2004). Conversely, there are various studies that seek to prove through ethnographic research findings, that globalization has not benefited all sectors of NMC uniformly. They refute the notion of a homogeneous Indian middle class as evenly benefiting from the recent neo-liberal economic reforms. They reiterate that it is chiefly the upper tier of the NMC who are globalized and upwardly mobile and who have greatly benefited from globalization. These studies further go on to establish that numerous sectors of the NMC, particularly the lower and middle tiers of the NMC, are still economically insolvent and have not benefited in any significant degree by the practices of globalization. Even among the so-called beneficiaries, a few segments of the NMC -including the upper tier- face issues and challenges related to family and overall human development combined with work-related pressures. These problems have caused mental stress, health issues and unrest in their personal and professional relationships. According to Vinita Pandey, urban living, and its stress are creating tremendous health problems amongst the NMC and others (2009). The lower and middle tiers of the NMC who hadn't benefitted much from the new economic reforms, face several urgent issues and challenges that need focused attention.

The Indian Family

Several social scientists have used the term 'family' to refer to a distinguishing characteristic of social life. The Functionalist's view on family focuses mainly on terms of activity and their effect on society (Mahesh, "Family" 15). However, the Marxist viewpoint elucidates upon the family as "the basic unit of oppression and to envisage its eventual abolition" (15). The family institution is the fundamental foundation for the individual as well as for the collective development of society. MacIver and Page note, that out of all the organizations, large and small, which the society bequeaths us, none surpasses the family in the strength of its sociological significance. The family unit influences the entire society in various ways, and changes in its composition reverberate through the whole structure. It is capable of endless variation and yet reveals a remarkable continuity and persistence despite change (240). Since the human civilization is markedly progressive; consequently, the definition of family has undergone innumerable changes. Currently, the

transforming impact of globalization on the NMC families and its contemporary makeover and related dynamics viz its changing form, functions, and structure are crucial for understanding the NMC and for drawing implications for the socio-economic structure in India and beyond.

Formation of the NMC Family: Disintegration to Transformation

Indian society and the traditional joint family structure advocates social solidarity coupled with interdependence and follow the tenets of collectivism (Chadda and Deb 2000). The family in its traditional sense it is still intact; however, it is undeniable that the joint family system has suffered from disintegration. According to J.P. Singh, the Indian society is witnessing unprecedented transformation, wherein the traditional joint family system is effectively disappearing from the urban scenario. He further observes that there is an increased proportion of female-headed households, a decline in the average age of household heads and a steep rise in separation and divorce cases. Moreover, disagreements and conflicts between spouses, parents and children are increasing steadily. Greater freedom of marital choice, increased involvement of females in decision-making, lack of attachment to kinship and the conflicting dialogue between parents and grown-up children on familial matters are increasingly observed today (2004). Globalization has been considered as a prime factor in spreading the dissimilar forms, ideologies, and practices of different family patterns and lifestyles (Trask 2010). The task of analyzing the beneficial vs detrimental changes taking place within the NMC's family context is a complicated one. Undoubtedly, the family institution is undergoing a severe crisis and is on the brink of a significant transformation.

Changing Joint family and Household Dynamics

The traditional joint family system in India has undergone both structural and functional changes, thereby further influencing and transforming Indian households and families (Ganguly-Scrase 2003). There are several factors responsible for the disruption of the joint family system in India. Aileen Ross, who studied Hindu families in an urbanized setting, provides insightful observations about the changes that have taken place over a period and are continuing. Elaborating on the Hindu family, Ross opines:
(1) The present trend of family form is indicating a breakaway from the traditional joint family form into nuclear family units.
(2) The most typical form of family life is presently the small joint family.
(3) An increasing number of people in contemporary society spend at least a part of their lives in single-family units.
(4) The norm for city-dwellers these days is living in various types of the families during their lifetime. This trend is so widespread one can observe cycles of family types in a typical city-dweller's life.
(5) The present generation does not give as much importance to distant relatives are as did their parents and grandparents.
(6) An average city-dweller's offspring has become more spatially separated from all relatives (Ross 1961).

Globalization has intensified family transformation still further and has ushered rapid changes. The aforementioned scenario is more widely prevalent among the NMCs as the "majority of them live away from their families and, in some cases, both son and daughter-in-law are working. Due to the increasing disruption in the joint family structure, many of the families are not living together, even if they live in the same city (S. Lamb 1990). Manisha Jha enumerates these developments and further acknowledges the overt changes in the family structure, redefined neighborhoods, the notion of recreation as well as the growing caste and religious intolerance. She reiterates that such changes have transformed the existent family dynamics and created a breakdown of the extended and joint families, which in turn has contributed significantly to a crisis of urban middle class. Although Indians are known to revere the joint family, but there is an increasing realization about the conflicts, arguments, envy, pain, and disturbance that exist within joint families (S. Lamb 1990).

The Changing Family Structure: New Forms of Family

Vinodh Kumar asserts that urban society in India, since the past two decades, is experiencing a significant transformation in its family relationships and marriage institution due to the rapid growth of the public sector, and the consequent entrance of global companies and IT-related industries. This has resulted in both positive and negative outcomes (2013). However, there is no conclusive evidence about how fast the nuclear family is replacing the joint family structure; moreover, most Indians still prefer to be in joint families. Nevertheless, it is clearly apparent that the trend of nuclear family structures is emerging cand is here to stay (Niranjan et al.; Shah 2005). Anchalesh Kumar further explores the changing dynamics of family structures and notes that Modernization and Globalization have led to a definite change in the family structure and the original structure of family has undergone a paradigm shift. The current fashion is to live in a nuclear family and the joint family system seems to be an obsolete structure. Contrary to the widespread popularity of the joint family system in the bygone era, the younger generation prefers the nuclear family system (2012). Kumar further asserts that the family pattern has witnessed a groundbreaking transformation during the industrial revolution.

The Extended Family

In this era of accelerated urbanization, globalization has an immense influence on the urban society. R. Mukherjee (1965), while describing the extended family pattern and its development, observes that the ties of kinship bind an individual both to the family of orientation, into which one is born and to the family of procreation, which one founds at marriage, which is often inclusive of the spouse's relatives. The nuclear family may also have an extension through the acquisition of more than one spouse, or of several generations connected in the male or female line or through the combined residence of two or more married couples and their children. This structure, known as the extended family, is widespread in many parts of the world, and not exclusive to pastoral and agricultural economics (S. Rao). Sarah Lamb, an ethnographic researcher based in Kolkata, opines that joint families are intact, and that the majority of India still lives in "joint families". Lamb further infers that social change is invariably brought about by the young while the old remain steeped in cultural traditions. Although globalization has given rise to numerous positive changes, it has also proved to be a threat to the Indian family patterns and functions. Traditional values such as the concept of marriage as a divine covenant, parental responsibility and relationship and other such social morals and norms have suffered a setback. It is also influenced the time-proven socio-cultural norms, family traditions, and values which are gradually being disoriented and displaced (2010).

The Nuclear Family

There has been extended discussion on the nuclear family-which consists only of parents and children-in contemporary discourses (A. Kumar). The nuclear family tends to move away from the joint family and base themselves into smaller units, often by choice and sometimes due to pressing needs. Henrike Donner asserts that the supposed family ideal, such as the joint family, does not always reflect the actual practices. She comments, "whilst the extended joint family is upheld as an ideal, the nuclear family unit is increasingly taking place, especially in places like Bangalore where middle class employees migrate for work" (2012). However, more contextual empirical insights are needed to determine the precise nature of how nuclear families are notably increasing in urban India. Nevertheless, the NMC family size is in a state of flux and changing rapidly (A. Kumar). Conversely, Indian nuclear families are "nuclear" in a different way when compared to what is seen in the Western world. Even if Indian families are living elsewhere for economic or other reasons, they continue to have strong family ties with their extended families, such as parents, siblings, grandparents, and other relatives, (Thankachan). However, this cohesive unit has now been split and family life has become estranged. For instance, there is an increasing practice of keeping children in daycare centers while their parents are working, since grandparents are not a part of the family to the same extent as before (Overgaard).

One-person Households (OPH)

S. Coontz is of the opinion that societies tend to emphasize specific family forms over new forms. Since culturally privileged family patterns have certain advantages, those who adopt modern arrangements for some or other benefits, face great dishonor and hindrances (Trask 2010). Despite this, according to Premchand Dommaraju, the OPH is on the rise, both in small and big cities and the number of such households is estimated to grow further in the next few decades. He further notes that "it reveals the socio-cultural and demographically important social, economic and demographic differences between one-person and multi-person households. Here, elderly females and young migrants who live alone are potential vulnerable groups" (Dommaraju). Job and business opportunities for both males and females have increased thereby providing financial independence. This has further distanced them from their family due to the lack of their reliance on parents for housing and other such needs (Derne et al.). Further, urban India is witnessing an increasing number of divorcees, widows, and widowers among the NMC and such OPH households that are becoming a significant reality. In addition to this is the NMC migration, particularly of young people who are moving to urban areas in search of new opportunities. This phenomenon too is restructuring living arrangements (Taylor and Bain). OPH therefore is slowly but steadily escalating in urban India, and though we cannot gauge the speed of increase, but it is a foregone conclusion that it's steady rise will continue unabated.

Family Functions: Changing Dynamics

According to The Columbia Encyclopaedia, economic, social, and educational reproduction are the primary functions of the family. In the changing scenario, however, Bahira Trask observes that globalizing forces are transforming such functions of the family that relate to traditional notions of family- life, work, identity, and interpersonal relationships (2010). Vinodh Kumar asserts that the economic functions of the family are undergoing a change at places where the social and cultural function of the family has undergone significant transformation. As the family changes, "the functions regarding marriage rituals, procedures have also seen changes. There has also been a slight change in the attitude of the people of this community regarding widow- remarriage and divorce" (A. Kumar). The economic sphere is therefore a significant area where we have witnessed a paradigm transformation specially in the sphere that relates to earning. Today, the economic and financial authority is not centered in the hands of the head of the family but is effectively disseminated among family members who are self-sufficient and independent due to their economic independence. The influence of modern education and impact of information revolution have also played a major role in this transformation. Due to these and several other changes, the functional aspects of the family unit are undergoing a transformational phase that has immense significance.

Fluid Roles of Gender Relations

The current influence of liberalization and globalization has ensured that the family functions are now closely related to gender. The emergence of "the modern", "new" Indian woman in the post-liberalization era symbolizes the synthesis of tradition and modernity within a distinctly, Indian national identity (McLachlin et al., 2012). However, the notion of the "New Indian woman" is accompanied by fluidity and hybridity. She exemplifies a mingling of the traditional and modern since the contemporary woman can exemplify both the traditional cultural identity of "Indian" and the authenticity of the changing social arrangements (McLachlin et al.). It therefore follows that gender equation among the NMC is changing rapidly since globalization has already altered numerous perceptions about gender- status, role, and privileges, freedom, individuality, socialization and care of children, the well-being of the elderly, work, and family relationships et.al. The gap between male and female among the NMCs is constantly declining and new gender roles are coming into existence.

Conclusion

The contemporary globalization along with liberalization and urbanization is at the helm of family transformation. The NMC family is struggling to preserve the whole traditional cohesion in the modern scenario. However, the basic characteristics of the traditional family value system are still in existence. The NMC family is mostly recognized as the "new rich" consumerist, having a comfortable and peaceful existence. Despite this apparent utopia, several pressing issues, and the level of stress among the urban professionals and their families are on the rise. A positive and sensitive approach is needed to address these issues if one seeks to avoid further family, health, and relationship breakdown. Such harmful consequences are deeply detrimental both for the family and the society at large. The study indicates that the NMC family is on the threshold of becoming a key segment of the population in urban India, as in other parts of the world. Globalization has an immense appeal for the consumerist, "glocal" and "upwardly mobile" NMC. Its far-reaching effects on the NMCs economic, cultural, family, and religious domains will be a challenge to the NMC's global movements, moral pursuits and ideals, and ultimately its social dynamics.