

## Changes in the Institution of Family and Class Values: An Analysis

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### Abstract

The present paper attempts to understand the changes in the institution of family and its link with the changing class values promoted by globalization. This paper is developed based on the review of existing literature on the topic and the observations of the author in his routine life as well as discussions with the experts. Three major propositions are presented and established logically in the paper. They are: 1. the link between changing familial and class values; 2. the role of globalization in the changing value systems of family in India; 3. the importance of understanding changes in the institution of family for the understanding of social class. The present paper attempted to explore new connections and abstractions at the theoretical level that can be further studied empirically.

**Key Words:** Family, Social Class, Social change, Values, Globalization, Social institutions

### **Introduction**

Family is, by and large, the nucleus of societies across the world. Unlike other social institutions, family is undergoing rapid socio-economic changes owing a lot to globalization. This has been a distinctive feature of the contemporary world. Globalization has been defined in terms of time-space compression (Harvey, 1989); spreading of events taking place at distance (Giddens, 1990) and networking (Castells, 1998). It is also defined as a set of related processes interconnecting individuals, groups, communities, states, markets, corporations and international government and non-government organizations in a complex web of social relations (Alberto, 2001). Economic and socio-cultural impact of globalization on family is evident today. Especially,

cultural globalization plays a vital role in bringing about changes in family values. Roland Robertson, who is regarded as the father of globalization, has made an attempt to analyze cultural globalization by referring to “the trans-societal culture which takes variety of forms”. In support of this, S.L. Doshi (2003) observes that globalization has made tremendous influence on the cultures of the world societies.

The focus of this research paper is to establish a link between globalization on the one hand and family and class on the other hand. The central arguments are presented in the following propositions.

1. Globalization has increased the gap between middle and upper classes.

2. Social status of people is associated more with their lifestyle promoted by globalization than with the social hierarchy entwined with traditional societies. The status is thus an outcome of the lifestyle which is subject to change according to the changing culture ushered by the globalization trends from time to time.
3. Lifestyle oriented status is an important criterion for the middle class people to identify themselves with the upper class people. And, class is more oriented to the lifestyle of the people than their economic position.
4. In the process of social mobility, the ingrained tendency of the middle class people is to identify themselves with the upper class people by imitating the latter's lifestyle.

### **Globalization and Family**

In India, family is the most vital institution that has been surviving through the ages. Globalization fosters individualism in the Indian family system which is in opposition to collectivism once nurtured by the traditional values associated with it. It has opened up new avenues of women employment in the urban areas which in turn resulted in the substantial increase in the number of middle and upper-class women engaged in various jobs to supplement their family income.

Globalization facilitates the diffusion of its resultant product, viz. global culture across the world. The forms and functions

of family are undergoing adaptive changes in accordance with the changes in technological and economic superstructure of society (P. Murpock, 1994). This superstructure is in turn subject to change accelerated by globalization. During the twentieth century, two major changes occurred in the western countries that had affected family altogether. One was the practice of cohabitation (Trost, 1979; Karunanithi, 2005) and the other was the increase in divorce rate (Karunanithi, 2005; Moxnes, 1990; Aharons and Rodges, 1987). Once the values that glorified family have now given way to support the importance of individual freedom and personal development in the western industrialized societies (Lasthaeghe, 1995; Va de kaa, 1987). The conception of family by western people is getting reflected in their Indian counterparts owing greatly to the phenomenon of globalization.

The relationship between parents and children is undergoing notable changes due to the new socio-economic policies necessitated by globalization. One radical change brought about by the industrialization is that the parents could not find adequate time to be with their children. It is further augmented by globalization by promoting rapid industrialization in world societies. Nevertheless, children's wellbeing depends on their parental time investment with them. An appreciable increase of women employment has substantially decreased their time to take care of their children. In other words, their employment and duration of work do not

match with the time of their children. Moreover the parents leave home for work early in the morning and get back late in the evening. In this situation, they hardly find time to interact with their children. But, during their childhood, they did not experience this sort of thing with their parents. It is one of the paradoxes of modern life. This has almost been a phenomenon prevalent in highly industrial societies all over the world. One may observe a similar trend in highly industrialized cities in India where the parents are able to cater to the material needs of their children, but not their emotional needs. Besides, the competitive schooling and excessive dependence on electronic entertainment have also widened the gap between the children and their parents. This would also lead the children to unhealthy eating of junk food in the company of their friends. This has been vivid in the developed countries, especially U.S.A and European countries.

The relationship between parents and their children is associated with the norms and values of society. The behavior of parents towards their children is affected not only by their composite characteristics, but also by their cultural norms and values. (Liana, Sazanne, 2004). The global culture has brought about changes in these cultural norms and values, which has in turn changed the parental behavior towards their children. The parental role which regulates the relationship among the family members is also immensely influenced by the globalization. As they need to perform multifarious roles in the complex

societies, they are caught between role conflicts. Consequently, they are slowly getting away from a state of intimate relationship within family resulting in the weakening of intra-familial relationship. This would in a long way lead to family disorganization.

The changes in family are not limited to parent-children relationship. A good deal of research discloses that the important transformation in marital process has reduced the incidences of arranged marriages and increased the incidences of love marriages. The argument by Anthony Gidden (1992) about the transformation of conjugal intimacy suggests that in the contemporary world, the process of individualization, detraditionalization and increasing trend of self-reflexivity promoted by globalization have opened avenues for possible changes in the family.

Globalization has also resulted in changes in the construction and conceptualization of love patterns. For instance, the intimacy and mutual care are increasingly taking place outside the ambit of family, i.e., between partners who have cohabitation even though they live separately. Sometimes they live together without getting married because, to them, marriage is not a prerequisite to live together. This relationship between them is a partner relationship, which is primarily a transitory. They want to be free to break their relationship at any time and enter into that sort of relationship with new partners. Such unmarried union based on partner relationship seems to have not promoted the stability of the

family. But it would undisputedly challenge the core element of the family system (Karunanithi, 2005).

The impact of globalization has gradually expanded the social structures that are taking over the functions such as medical care, education and occupational training which are originally performed by family. The importance of family is pushed back remarkably by host institutions that are taking over the task of family (Saraswathi Raju Iyer, 2004). It may happen in future that the extra-familial relations rather than intra-familial relations, especially in industrial societies would provide a state of congeniality in which love rather than rights would take precedence. As such, Industrialization, urbanization and technological advancement have been instrumental in bring about changes in family structures, values and lifestyles.

### **Globalization and Class**

The family values differ from class to class. Especially the middle class seems to be more obsessed with family values than the upper and lower classes. Nevertheless, the shift in economic policy in favour of privatization, liberalization and globalization has brought about changes in the middle class families particularly in their consumer behavior. Indian middle class which lays emphasis mainly on education, occupation and income, consists of academics, civil servants, clerks, school teachers, and managers in working organization, traders, shop keepers and the like. Its size, composition and social values are changing (Andre Beteille, 1992).

According to Max Weber, if one sells his labour, he belongs to proletarian class, but if he sells his ability in the form of labour commodity acquired through training, vocational or otherwise, he belongs to the middle class. The 'middle class' explained by Marx is a combination of technical professions like bureaucrats and clerical staff (G. Karunanithi, 1991). Marx and Engle point out that bourgeoisie has torn away the family from its sentimental veil and reduced it to a mere money relation. The increasing material need of middle class family is getting along with the material culture which is an imperative one to keep pace with globalization. A sort of psychological adaptation is essential to cope with this process. For instance, Yogendra Singh (1994) observes:

In the modern nuclear family, the emotional universe of the child oscillates between degrees of attachment and alienation and the resultant tension breeds a type of personality which has greater empathic capacity and is more independent and capable to cope with crisis situations. But such a personality also initiates individualistic tendencies which are against the core sentiment of the family.

In the contemporary times, middle class families are undergoing structural and functional changes. Members of the family are burdened with the duty of

replicating the existing norms and values of the family system. Failure of this would lead to ideological changes in family. The structural and ideological changes in the family are thus imperative at this stage. Especially in India, the changes in middle class family are structural and functional which are facilitated by the ideological changes warranted by globalization.

Individual's status is also a criterion for class. For instance, those who are in high status would constitute the upper class. The lifestyle of this class people is more oriented to western than the lifestyle of their counterparts in lower class. In other words, the middle and working class people could not offer to enjoy the lifestyle of the upper class people. However, globalization has increased the interest of the middle class people to achieve high status and move to the upper class status. Modernity facilitates individuals' freedom of choice to go with their way of life, which also facilitates class mobility. For instance, at present, growing number of men and women no longer adhere to tradition in terms of mate choice, consulting their elders in relation to personal and occupational matters, rearing their children and the like. In addition to this, they are also trying to free themselves from the fetters that prevent their social mobility. Ganeswar Misra (1995) emphasizes that middle and upper class families in urban areas are undergoing a dramatic transformation, because the younger generation from those families is questioning power issues, traditional

roles, hierarchical relationships, obligations, and loyalty relating to family. The regard towards kinsmen and the elderly has also changed rather decreased to a certain extent.

In the process of globalization, the western values in social life spread rapidly across Third World and developing countries including India. The major changes in the family value system are taking place in developing countries owing to westernization facilitated by the globalization. The people in different class categories need to restructure their family values in accordance with the growing industrial economy being accelerated by globalization.

Globalization has triggered the class mobility from middle class to upper class by bringing about rapid changes in lifestyle. As such, the social mobility of middle class people, which is accomplished not by their economic prosperity but by their lifestyle has resulted the individuals in a state of stress as they lack money which is an essential factor to lead a standard of life on par with the wealthy upper class people. In order to reach that level, they prefer to enter into second economy (secondary job) besides their first economy (main job from which they draw major source of income). In several families in major towns and cities in India, the couples face stress mainly due to dual jobs. In such situations, they have to forego certain obligations and duties related to their family. For instance, the male-female obligations and their duties in family are experiencing tremendous changes and

their role in socializing their children is disappearing.

Globalization has generated several employment avenues because of the establishment of many multinational companies all over India. As a result of this, the employees with different designations constitute various class categories according to their position and income. In the course of time, these emerging classes would cut across the boundaries of caste, ethnicity and religion. These classes may not fit into the framework of traditional class categories: lower, middle, upper. Their ascribed status is no more an indicator of their class position. In a similar way, their material well being is not necessarily a criterion of their class position. However, the impact of western values on their social life proves to be an important reason for their class identity.

As M.N. Srinivas (1995) observes that those who have participated in the westernization process is in a more immediate sense, who attended the new educational institutions, entered the professions, took up jobs in bureaucracy, and engaged themselves in trade, commerce and industry in large and developing towns. Thus the interest of the middle class people to raise their class position makes them adapt western lifestyle. This lifestyle rather than wealth is an easy way for them to accomplish class mobility.

In the context of globalization, norms of a society are losing their importance because of individual orientation and

parochial outlook of the people. Family obligations and duties once considered as a part of normative system, are now oriented to individuals' perception and ideology. One may find multiple bread winners in a family, which weakens the functional coordination among its members because of their increasing economic independency advanced by growing employment market. This trend would liberate them from the traditional hangover that united the family members over generations. This would also promote individuality among them and their desire for social mobility. Moreover, in dual earner families, the roles of husband and wife are undergoing dramatic changes. For instance, in several families, they share their roles in performing common domestic work mainly to satisfy their needs. In the contemporary industrialized societies, one may see in dual earner families that men look after their children when women happen to be the main bread winners. In case both of them are employed, they put their children in crèches in the absence of elderly family members. This is a case in point to show the functional changes in family induced by their growing needs in the globalization era.

For class mobility, the preference of status in terms of occupation and lifestyles has resulted in intra-familial disparity in class identity. Some family members are able to identify with upper class people who rise to that level through occupation and respective lifestyle whereas the rest of them are in identity

crisis as they neither identify with those nor do they identify with lower class people. It does not mean that the class identity or mobility is linked with family disorganization. However, this difference would amount to the weakening of intra-familial relations and thereby waning of mutual trust, cooperation and obligations among the family members.

Thus, securing high social status through occupation and lifestyle is crucial for self-advancement in a community in general and in family in particular. In the middle class families, the conception of traditional norms and values regulating gender division of labour, husband-wife relations, parent-children relations, sibling relations and the like is changing in accordance with the pace of globalization. As a result of this, the role of those norms and values is not vital in various activities of family. This change has resulted in individual freedom of its members to prefer their choice of lifestyle.

Globalization has increased the tendency of middle class people towards status mobility and thereby leading them to class mobility. The changing role expectations generated by globalization are also linked with the changing norms and values associated with family. However, a tension prevails because of the transformations of the family from tradition to the modern requires conflict among the norms and values. Some studies disclose that the values and attitudes of members in Indian family are still in favour of the joint family system. It is understood that the changes in social

values due to globalization is an important factor for stimulating changes within the family.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion in this paper confirms that the social class is an impotent criterion to explain changes in the institution of family in the context of globalization that makes family a class oriented unit. It is also noted that the middle class, rather than the upper and lower classes, is undergoing rapid change due to globalization. It also makes it clear as how the prevailing lifestyle can change the conception of class. For instance, in contemporary times, due to globalization, adapting the lifestyle of westerners itself is a criterion of social status which enables people to identify themselves with upper class people. Thus, lifestyle is a criterion of status, and status in turn is associated with the class location of the concerned people. Moreover, class identity differs from person to person even within a family according to their occupation, income and lifestyle. This emerging trend in the globalization process is obvious. The class orientation of individuals due to globalization is responsible for the disorganization of the middle class family. Globalization increases the need of people for better lifestyle and enables them to adapt to western values. It changes the social conception of class. Thus, social status, which is a crucial determinant of class identity in the modern society, can also be achieved through lifestyle enhancement at the individual level.

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