

Globalization and gender in South Asia

Abstract

This review papers examines the affects of globalisation on gender equality (or lack thereof) in South Asia countries. It examines how social structures can be constituted in ways that advantage women at the macro, meso, and micro levels, challenging existing debates that women's agency is preordained and defined by powerful clan and religious societies. Further, the paper examines how institutions in global organisation fields place pressures for change on existing national institutions in such a way that mimetic and coercive isomorphism occurs. It explains how institutional isomorphism maintains the current norms of gender inequality. The paper aims to make a substantial contribution to the literature on gender and institutional change by illustrating how socially mobile groups influence institutional forces in existing organisational fields. The paper explores avenues for policies that advance the rights of women in these societies.

Key Words: globalisation, social structure, institutional isomorphism, South Asia

Introduction

South Asia, unwavering in its own cultural, sociological and ideological traditions, is a bright star. It has all the hallmarks of achieving transformation economically, sociologically, politically, by shaking off traditional barriers and bridging new beginnings. From a diversity perspective in which gender is embedded, new bridges can be made by increasing legislative Acts, forging new policy arrangements, establishing Government sponsored micro-economic activity, and by a greater focus on diversity and gender policies within organisations. Globalization however is a double-edged sword both prophetic and insidious. It is prophetic in the sense that South Asian countries see rapid growth through foreign direct investment - an opportunity to parallel developing countries' living standards; insidious since rapid growth challenges traditional orthodoxy, in religion, in culture, in work values, in family and sense of community. Here, women seek to confront the struggles and shape the future as much by what they wish to change by what they seek to defend. So how does gender fare on a continuum that needs to move from both ends? At one end are globalised standards reflecting greater autonomy and equal opportunity - conflicting values from what South Asia society is familiar; at the other is patriarchal society, gendered expectations in the doing of work, culturally-driven, the blending of laws with religion, and community practices that reinforce the notion of family and gendered roles. It is unlikely however that gender equality will progress in South Asian society unless institutions themselves, both Government and Business, comprehend the context(s) in which gender is played out.

Gender in these societies is constructed at multiple levels – government, business, individual and community. Typically, these may be different from one country to the next.

Many studies on South Asia bring to the forefront significant gender constraints in society including *purdah* or female exclusion that restricts mobility and opportunities in the public domain while simultaneously conferring on women the status of a protected group (Kabeer, 2011: 501). Constraints are found at nearly every level of society through unequal access to property, lower wages, lack of promotional opportunity, gender divisions in labour generally and the dependence of women on patriarchal arrangements (Arora, 2012; Cook and Saini, 2010; Lucy, Ghosh and Kujawa, 2008; Syed 2008). Mostly, these studies have addressed the constraints imposed by the intersection of economic, socio-political and legal forces with culture, religion and work-based values in much the same way that traditional gender studies have examined class, race and gender (Acker, 2006; Andersen, 2005; Risman, 2004). Similarly, frameworks of diversity have been useful to study gender issues by focusing on the interconnectedness of state, organisation and individual relations (Syed and Özbilgin, 2009), that may also be applied relatively universally through diversity models (Kramar, 2012; Thomas and Ely, 1996). However diversity frameworks focus mainly on diversity. Few studies in South Asia have examined a range of strategies that can be deployed to tackle gender bias and stereotype at the micro level. In the economic and development literature, micro-financing through non government organisations (NGOs) has been used as a way to empower lower-level groups particularly women in farming communities (Kabeer, 2011; Lucy, Ghosh and Kujawa, 2008). The evolution of various mechanisms however to empower women in ways that allow them to construct, reconstruct and change their lives at the community level are scarce.

Similarly, while studies of developing countries with respect to globalisation as a force for economic integration, technological diffusion and information generation has opened up opportunities for women (World Development Report, 2012; Lin and Hou, 2010; Khilji , 2004), few studies have examined the mechanisms that can potentially assist women to break free of the socio-cultural and legal barriers they face in gendered situations. Arguably, greater economic integration has placed

increasing pressure on institutional arrangements between government, business and community. To this end, there is a paucity of research on the type of mechanisms required to challenge institutional frameworks in ways that solve deep-rooted gendered problems. The paper discusses how socially mobile groups (SMGs) on the basis of their mobility and power to network, challenge homogenous groups along class and gendered lines. They have the capacity to make a greater impact on gender equality than NGOs which are common to the region. Although NGOs provide the basic social mechanism for SMGs to develop, NGOs are not sufficient by themselves to free women from the every-day struggles they face because of their ties and dependence on local communities. The paper discusses how SMGs are potentially a more powerful alternative mechanism in South Asian communities to connect one institutional level to another (e.g. macro to meso). The paper extends existing literature debates by extending the micro level of analysis to individuals in communities as well as individuals in organisations. Overall, this paper seeks to make a major contribution to advancing the rights of women as individuals and in their communities in South Asian countries. Against a background of globalisation and integration, this paper addresses the structuring of social activities and interactions that enable women to express their cultural and gendered preferences.

This paper is organised along the following lines. First, it describes the context of South Asia society in which gender is located. The discussion largely focuses on India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as largely representing the broader region. The impact of globalisation on the region is examined with respect to gendered experiences and outcomes. Second, different ways of examining gender are reviewed from an historical perspective so as to inform the gendered realities observed. Out of these, the interpretation of gender as social structure is preferred as activities that are structured and reconstructed through social interaction and accountability (Connell, 2010; Acker, 2006; Martin, 2004). The discussion reviews conflicts outlined between State and organisation and organisation and individual in which social reality is played out. These approaches are also supplemented by the multi-level framework of diversity such as the relational approach outlined as a way in which social structure takes root as the principal agent of mainstreaming gender change. Since gender, race and class are closely connected (Acker, 2006), gender is viewed within these relational frameworks in such

a way that they support gender as social construction. Third, institutional theory is used as a more robust sociological perspective to place the study of gender in context. This section of the paper illustrates how organisational fields develop in response to globalisation and how they organise around a common set of values and beliefs (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996: 1023). The discussion examines the effects of institutional change from global organisation fields by seeking to understand their influence on women in society. Fourth, the paper integrates the common themes of gender, globalisation and institutional change to discuss both the limitations and prospects for changing gender outcomes in South Asia. Several hypotheses are developed for testing in subsequent work. The paper now turns to a discussion of South Asian countries with respect to their predisposition towards globalisation and its effects on gendered relations.

Gender and Globalisation

Globalization is widely acknowledged as a framework for enhanced economic integration, increased technological diffusion, and significant access to information in developing countries (World Development Report 2012; Gray, Kittilson, and Sandholtz, 2006). However it is more often thought of in economic terms as the trans-border movement of goods, services, capital, people, ideas, information and symbols (Gray et al., 2006). Its benefits have been staggering for all countries, most notably because of foreign direct investment and policies for trade liberalisation leading to massive exports and investments in countries (World Development Report, 2012; Arora, 2012; Hossain and Hossain, 2012). Given the belief that the West stands to learn and benefit from the East as much as the East can benefit from the West (Chen and Miller, 2010; Gupta, 2011), this means that largely western organisations and Eastern institutions need mechanisms by which global integration can take root in ways that improve productivity. For women global integration should mean increased opportunities for participation in work and equal access to resources. This is particularly pervasive for the study of gender since gender inequality and lack of participation is often seen as a by-product of globalisation as much as a beneficiary. In terms of changing the dynamic of gender equality and lifting the wealth of societies, global integration has led to greater access to world markets to address short term capital

deficiency problems. Importantly, although not without heavy criticism, globalization has enabled the transfer of technology, training, and skills and has increased export opportunities (Hossain and Hossain, 2012; World Development Report, 2012; Gray et al., 2006).

Similarly, foreign direct investment benefits from global integration have led to increased local investment in the important areas of health and education and access to jobs for women mostly in export jobs. Women's migration from farms to urban communities has meant increasing access to export jobs in urban factories (World Development Report, 2012). Generally, increased trade opportunities in these countries have enhanced country's collective wealth. For instance, the flow of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and stronger connection to world markets has translated into more income parity for households, greater access to economic opportunities especially in micro or local economies through micro financing and a level of participation for women in some cases that has challenged patriarchal traditions (Kabeer, 2011, Mumtaz, 2006; Gray et al., 2006). As well, developing countries have been able to learn from developed countries about the role of women in wider society (Gray et al., 2006). It should be noted though that economic growth has not flowed into dramatic increases in health and education which are two of the key areas that contribute to women's well-being (Kaur, 2010).

Moreover, increasing globalisation has led to institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations to encourage developing nations to join a number of world conventions against inequality for women (United Nations, 1988). The most well-known of these has been the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This has led many scholars and commentators to conclude that gender inequality has "more costs in an integrated world...[as it]...can diminish countries' ability to compete internationally – particularly countries with export potential in goods and services with high female employment" (World Development Report, 2012: 254). For instance, South Asian countries seek to increase their rankings on the gender inequality index. The index - an initiative by the United Nations Development Programme - measures maternal mortality and adolescent fertility, the number of seats attained by women in national parliament, the

percentage of women with secondary education, the labour force participation of women and the prevalence of contraception (HDR 2011; Schüller, 2006). In the 2011 index, India was ranked at 134, Pakistan 145, and Bangladesh, 146 respectively (Human Development Report, 2011). Accordingly, the rankings do not provide significant evidence of gender mainstreaming. Together with other human development rankings however, global conferences on gender (such as the Earth Summit; World Conferences on Human Rights) advance the rights of women at all levels of society calling on Governments “to make gender equality an explicit and central part of all policy and planning” (Gray et al. 2006: 300). Collectively, these efforts have helped to address the struggles of women in developing countries and to highlight specific gender disparities at state, business and community levels.

The benefits of globalisation however seem strangely abhorrent to the constraints that remain for women in South Asian countries. These appear to be embedded in socially constructed mores maintained and reconstructed in daily life and especially expressed in the division of labour, lack of access to education and resources, women’s restricted mobility and norms of patrilocal communities and village exogamy (Kabeer, 2011; Kaur, 2010; Lucy, Ghosh, Kujawa, 2008). Women in these situations become more dependent on their communities that shape individual identities in ways that reinforce existing social norms. Thus, while CEDAW membership has often led to significant transformations at work (World Development Report, 2012; Weiss, 2003; Celik, 2004), most of which has come about through multi-nationals, the effects on gender appear to be disparate and quite differentiated across these countries. In fact, it is difficult to determine the real benefits for women arising from globalisation. There are two mainstream schools of thought, one very much critical the other more sanguine. The critical school argues the case against globalization. Here, globalization does nothing more than reinforce the subordination of women to low paid, low status and part time jobs (Gray et al., 2006; Moghadam, 1999). Global integration is believed to be more oppressive on people of lower caste and in rural and urban areas, further widening the gap between rich and poor and disabling the marginalised in ways that lead to greater dependence on patriarchal family (Arora, 2012; Faisal and Rizavi, 2011; Wright, 1995). For instance in India, some studies have found that women have been exploited by working long hours with low wages and that globalisation has led to poor

access to land, credit, and education and health facilities (Pande ,2007). These studies illustrate that far from empowering women by removal of barriers in global investment, and reversing their powerlessness through greater access to jobs, women have increasingly found themselves in exploitive work situations with little opportunity for advancement and increased discrimination (Arora, 2012; Kaur, 2010; Sen, 2001; Wright, 1995).

The second school of thought promulgates greater agency for women because of globalisation. Greater openness to foreign markets through foreign direct investment has led to a significant infusion of women into job markets (Gray et al., 2006: 296). A number of studies indicate that high economic growth mainly through globalisation leads to reductions in gender inequality (Stotsky, 2006). Similarly, greater access to land and forms of credit enhances the decision making power within households in South Asian countries (Lucy et al., 2008; Morrison, Raju and Sinha, 2007). For instance, in Bangladesh, a thriving global economy is linked to reductions in poverty for both men and women, mainly through micro credit programs funded through NGOs. These especially benefit women by generating employment opportunities, providing increased training to augment skills leading to increased literacy that transforms the traditional roles of women in society by heightening awareness of basic rights (Kabeer, 2011; Lucy et al., 2008). Significantly, employment in manufacturing and services has grown faster in developing countries where global female employment increased from 6 and 17 percent respectively in 1987 to 7 and 24 percent in 2007 (World Development Report, 2012: 256). In India for instance, call centres employ more than 1 million people and higher female employment in export oriented businesses across the three countries has been supplemented by wage gains. Similar to other findings, female wages appear to lower the wage gap and insulate workers from economic cycles (Kaur, 2010). Since workers have greater access to labour protection policies in export organisations, wage discrimination against women is lower in the case of both manufacturing and agricultural exports. Summarily, women in South Asian firms have enhanced agency because of the growing feminization of jobs and business opportunities. Greater agency in the distribution of work has occurred because women can take their labour elsewhere; more personal

autonomy and independence and increased participatory opportunities in the public arena suggests women's emergence as public actors (Gray et al., 2006: 297).

In a comprehensive study of gender and globalisation in 185 countries, Gray et al., (2006) found higher levels of female life expectancy at birth in nations that had signed the CEDAW agreement, and that higher levels of economic growth were associated with higher levels of female life expectancy.

The study also found that CEDAW ratification was associated with lower levels of female illiteracy, an increase of women in the workforce and an increase in the number of women in parliament.

However, studies that indicate gender progress in equality are inconsistent with the reality played out in society. In India for instance, although a higher number of female wages are found in export organisations, the great majority of women still work in the agriculture, livestock and urban informal areas (Kaur, 2010). According to the National Commission for Women, 75 percent of all female workers are in agriculture; shifts to non-farm work occur mainly with men than women so that opportunities for labour in value-added export organisations favour men (Kaur, 2010). The degree of invisibility of women in India is pervasive along historical, traditional and cultural lines; compared to their active involvement in the Indian economy, women have been under-recognised in policies for training and extension programs (2010: 108). In a recent analysis of 15 Indian states measuring gender inequality in terms of access to education and health and whether gender inequality is lower in openness and globalised states, the results found that while overall high per capita income was associated with lower gender inequality and low per capita income in states with high inequality, some states with high income per capita coexisted with higher gender inequality (Arora, 2012:160). Overall, most states which ranked high in openness also had high gender inequality. Many disparities involving women are rooted in laws and religion which partially account for continued inequality irrespective of global progress. For instance, the Hindu Succession Act which grants equal shares to females for parental property is problematic because both the constitutional and legal frameworks which confer the right are framed by religion (Patel, 2006: 1256).

Similarly in Pakistan, there is widespread discrimination in labour force participation (14% females, 49.3% males) with women mostly employed in the informal sector and low paid menial jobs (Faisal and Rizavi, 2011). There is a high prevalence of poverty for men and women in rural areas, a high maternal mortality rate including high female mortality rate leading to a negative sex ratio (Mumtaz, 2006) and low access to educational programs (Ahmed and Bukhari, 2012). Also, while 40-50 percent of rural households borrow regularly under programs such as *zakat* (charitable donations) *bait-ul-maal* and microcredit, these programs fail to reach the women in communities that need it the most with studies finding that both government and NGO programs fail to reach the poorest (Mumtaz, 2006: xiv). Similar to India and Bangladesh, patriarchal household norms mean women have little or no say in decision making at community level or personally by surrendering to authority (Khilji, 2004). Women are disempowered through these arrangements although more recently the government has introduced affirmative action programs reserving seats for women across all tiers of governance (Mumtaz, 2006: xiv). Nonetheless, trade liberalisation has caused dramatic falls in gender inequality from the period 1973 to 2005 due to its effects on the labour market (Ahmed and Bukhari, 2012). Also within organisations, there is a clash between traditional and modern values. While values remain rooted in tradition with limited employee autonomy from top to bottom with employee involvement largely frowned upon, employees work-related values reflect the expectations of a modern market economy (Khilji, 2004). Largely however, the Pakistan government is viewed as in disarray, partly due to the country's long history in civil and military regimes that work to preserve the status quo in order to maintain some stability (Faisal and Rizavi, 2011). In a study of 24 public sector organisations involving 300 educated women in Pakistan, Faisal and Rizavi found that public sector organisations seem enthusiastic towards the welfare of female personnel as long as women are not demanding changes in the status quo (2011: 366). Their study suggests that the public education system in Pakistan needs to be overhauled before the struggles for women can be unravelled.

For Bangladesh, the rise of micro credit and NGOs appears to have mobilised women to challenge their system of patriarchy and individual identities. However, the government seems less committed to empowering policies for women outside of NGOs. Within the main areas of education, health, and

workforce participation, globalisation and gender in South Asia countries is largely differentiated and uncertain. Overall the influences and benefits of globalisation in Pakistan seem incongruent with the reality facing women's roles and place in society; gender inequity is likely to continue for some time in society, both at government, organisation and community level. Accordingly, gender mainstreaming effects are disparate as well leading to the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: The benefits of Globalisation do not translate into increased benefits for women in education, health, and workforce participation in South Asia countries.

Hypothesis 2: There is a lack of government legislation for empowering women at all levels of society.

Hypothesis 3: Community programmes that address gender inequality and advance women's rights have emerged because of a lack of shared economic prosperity.

Gender Models

Gender differences exist in society because of the prevailing societal and cultural norms about how women and men are perceived (Acker, 2006). When these perceptions are different and magnified, inequality is more pronounced. For example, gendered differences in employment and production will be subject to cultural bias or cultural frames that are deep-seated in society (Ridgeway, 2009).

Ridgeway (2009) suggests that individuals have one or two cultural frames or expectations of others they use to judge whether a person or situation matches this frame. A particular way of seeing the world through socialised values, cultural norms, and religious beliefs will be a sufficient reason for action that takes root in comparison to a neutral gendered approach where people irrespective of religion, race, colour and sex are equal (Murray and Syed, 2010; Acker, 2006; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Gendered relations are subversive because they often hide the real intention of those in power. That is, although gender is about sex differences and the views we hold about these differences, it is equally about social structure, of those in power and authority, of actors who socially construct

differences in work and social routines (Risman ,2004). In Bangladesh communities for instance, women are able to influence through social interaction their lives and situations for the better. However, beyond the community level, they are more likely to experience patterns of gender bias that preference men in employment situations and in occupational settings. For Risman, social structure means that:

“The ability to choose is patterned by social structure... actors occupy similar network positions in the social structure and evaluate their own options vis-a-vis the alternatives of similarly situated others. From such comparison, both norms and feelings of relative deprivation or advantage evolve. The social structure as the context of daily life creates action indirectly by shaping actors’ perceptions of their interest and directly by constraining choice.” (2004: 432).

To study gender and globalisation side-by-side suggests mainstream gendering outcomes will be equally influenced by social structures and not by sex differences. Currently, cultural expectations need to change to avoid situations such as those in Indian societies where women births fall well below those of males - women are largely inferior (Arora, 2012; Kaur, 2010). The idea of social structure is that action will be constrained by institutional frameworks because of practices that allocate power, roles and social relations. Cultural expectations favour men over women and social structures continue to act on people as much as people act on them (Ridgeway, 2009). Strong patriarchal communities in which women’s roles are sharply defined will be difficult to challenge. Another way of interpreting social structures is not so much to see institutions at a macro level and individuals at a micro level as this distorts their mutual constitution as Giddens (1984) suggests. That is, the institutions we are discussing in this paper are mutually inconsistent, are subject to continuous change, are permeated by power, have a legitimising ideology and are constituted and reconstituted (Martin, 2005). In much the same way that Bangladeshi women gain a sense of power through greater agency in the doing of their daily lives, they are both constituting and reconstituting the notion of self

and identity. The idea that social structure and social interaction is mutually reinforcing is highly relevant to this paper since, as was discussed earlier, the possibility of socially mobile groups is about ongoing adjustment, continuous change and reinterpretation, with profound social influences on roles and expectations.

Another useful view of gender is about gendered displays and gendered competence (Connell, 2010; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Goffman (1976) for instance notes that doing gender through gender displays (e.g. the roles that women act out related to household chores in South Asia) is a socially interactional and micro-political process outlining social expressions as either masculine or feminine (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Mostly, from the analysis conducted thus far, gendered relations in South Asia countries is very much a tradition, a routine, methodical and recurring accomplishment (1987: 126). Gender is also about attributions that one attaches to self and identity, both in looks, particular ways of acting and behaving and producing behaviours regarded as normative by others. So in a circumstance of patriarchal families or rule-oriented societies (e.g. norms related to early marriage), gender behaviour is about maintaining these accepted norms. Interestingly, women in some societies are challenging normative conceptions of gender through NGOs by not necessarily living up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity (1987: 136).

The particular characteristic(s) of gender favoured in this paper is the idea that gender is both socially constructed and embodied within the notion of doing gender. Government in South Asian countries have embraced the idea of globalisation because of the economic opportunities this brings. To a lesser extent, Governments have embraced organisational norms and international conventions in ways that have challenged their own traditions in local laws and regulations. For women, government policies and regulations have been slow to take root suggesting much about the embedded traditions of socially constructed arrangements. Similar to studies of diversity, the feminization of society and work is generally indigenous to Anglo-Western contexts - its transportation to South Asia with its strong ethnic diversity of laws and religion should be customised within the contexts of local socio-cultural

realities (Mustaq, 2009; Syed, 2008). Similarly, a multi-level framework of diversity that is similar to the conception of gender as social structure and social interaction would be a useful approach for South Asia countries to better understand how to mainstream gender priorities.

The multi-level framework of diversity is recognised at three levels: macro, meso and micro (Özbilgin, 2006). The first is the macro level. Here, laws, institutions, culture and political economy are self-subsistent based on deep traditions that maintain discrimination while foregrounding boundaries within these. The second is the meso level. Primary to this conception is the structure of different component parts of an organisation highlighted by behavioural differences at the individual, group and organisational level. At this level, employment relations are contextualised based on social as well as individual aspirations. Similar to how Giddens (1984) conceptualizes structure as ‘rules and resources’ used by actors in interaction, Syed and Özbilgin warn that shared preferences (by actors) are often dominated by the powerful elite (2009: 2443) in such a way that marginalised groups – e.g. women in rural communities – remain ignored. The third is the micro level. Here, this is associated with the social structure approach outlined earlier. Instead of seeing women as an elementary unit of organisational contexts where individual identity, priorities and objectives are fixed, the relational perspective holds that individual actions cannot be determined without understanding individual interrelations. Syed and Özbilgin suggest that:

“Individual identities and preferences are not pre-constituted: they do not enter into mutual interactions with their attributes already given. Rather, identities, including cultural values and networks of interpersonal, social relationships, are constituted within communities..[where]...one’ sense of identity [will] vary according to one’s relations with others.” (2009: 2444). Emphasis added

Multi-level frameworks of diversity with their underlying influences based on social structure and agency fits the approach taken about gender in this paper. The basis of these frameworks is reciprocal

relationships and influences of agents within them. At each level “individuals possess levels of unique resources and agency that equip her/him to formulate a suitable response to external challenges, both within and without the workplace” (Syed and Özbilgin 2009: 2446). To understand gender differences and gender inequality is to understand the context in which gender is played out at the macro, meso and micro level. Further, this brings to attention multiple and competing interests at different levels. Later, I discuss how these competing interests and different levels may be useful however in constructing an approach to gender that draws on the best of a multi-level approach, the best of a socially constructed approach, and the reality of promoting gender equality in rapidly developing countries through socially mobile groups.

Hypothesis 4: Social structures are a preferred gender mechanism for advancing gender issues along multiple structural lines in South Asia countries.

Hypothesis 5: Women become more confident in the doing of gender through social structures which adds to their sense of accomplishment and achievement.

Gender and Institutional Change

Gender is not only a function of social structure and difference but also change. The study of gender within its economic, social, political and cultural context is equally important in order to determine whether the pace and forces of change in these areas has improved gender equality or has contributed to its demise. One way to do this is through the sociological perspective of institutional theory which provides a robust sociological perspective to place gender strategies in context.

Institutional scholars explain that normative pressures are placed on organisations by the state and other regulatory authorities (including other organisations) in such a way that they change their structural arrangements to become more isomorphic with institutionally prescribed expectations (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Isomorphism is a constraining process that

forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983: 149). Two types of isomorphism emerged from the work of Meyer (1979) and Fennell (1980), that is, competitive and institutional. Competitive isomorphism assumes a system of rationality that emphasizes market competition, niche change, and fitness measures (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983; Hannan and Freeman, 1977); organisations seek to become isomorphic with their contexts and conform to contextual expectations of appropriate organisational forms in order to gain legitimacy and increase their probability of survival and fitness to perform (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996: 1026). For example, the forces that drive globalisation in export-oriented firms and the response by local organisations in South Asia may cause innovation in those organisations by imitating the global practices of investing organisations. Formal and informal pressures will occur on organisations by other organisations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in society within which organisations function (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983: 150). Institutional isomorphism by comparison occurs because of forces pressing organisations toward accommodation with the outside world as they “compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness” (1983: 150).

The institutional activities of a diverse set of organisations and their homogenization over time can be described as an organisational field. The latter is represented by a stream of organisations with similar and vested interests such as suppliers, consumers, agencies, governments or other organisations that are institutionally defined. These will be represented by inter-organizational structures of domination and patterns of coalition, increasing information and knowledge, and the development of mutual awareness that participants are involved in a common enterprise (Di Maggio, 1982). While organisational fields display significant diversity in their economic approaches in the early stages of a life cycle (competitive isomorphism), there is a push towards homogenization as the field becomes established (institutional isomorphism) such that “individual efforts to deal rationally with uncertainty and constraint often lead, in the aggregate, to homogeneity in structure, culture and output” (Di Maggio, 1983:147). For instance, a study by Carolan (2008) of New York City schools between 2000

and 2005 found that change - focused initially on significant reforms in the earlier years – was over time, “less and less driven by competition or the need to maximise performance but rather by the need for legitimation which results in the imitation of proximate institutionalized fields whose belief systems have come to dominate institutional life” (2008: 430). In a separate study of 36 Canadian national sport organizations, Slack and Hinings (1994) found that sporting organisations in the early years were controlled by volunteers operating relatively informally with professional help. However, a planning program institutionalised by Sport Canada had increasingly bureaucratized sport and organised sporting activities controlled by professionals and a “restructuring of lines of authority between professionals and volunteers” (1994: 807). That is, consistent with institutional isomorphism, ideas and procedures promoted by Sport Canada became institutionalized by sport organisations as both appropriate and necessary. This is similar to what Meyer and Rowan suggested that “rationalized and impersonal prescriptions that identify various social purposes as technical ones and specify in a rule-like way the appropriate means to pursue these technical purposes rationally...[are]...highly institutionalized and thus in some measure beyond the discretion of any individual participant or organization (1977: 343-344).

Gendered outcomes for women have much to do with the effects of competitive and institutional isomorphism because responses to globalisation require change and not all change activities leads to increased living standards for all. Change in organisations is a dynamic literature and beyond the scope of this paper. However, to the extent that it is isomorphic, it is relevant along two broad types of change: convergent change (fine tuning existing structures) and radical change (busting loose from an existing structure or orientation) (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996). The former is consistent with scholar’s idea of institutional change more broadly that organisational structures increasingly come to reflect rules legitimized within the state (Di Maggio and Powell 1983:150); also that resistance to change is tied to the normative embeddedness of organisations within their institutional context (Greenwood and Hinings: 1996: 1023). Radical change however is noted in innovations in organisational fields where technical requirements (e.g. call centres in rapidly growing export firms;

rapid shifts to manufacturing processes and movement of people in these areas away from agriculture) are more important in competitive formative years. Similarly, radical change is noted in 'ill-formed organizational fields associated with high political and economic differentiation in markets which enables organisations to flourish because of low institutional consensus (Fligstein, 1991; Barnett and Carroll, 1987). Lack of consensus in an organisational field highlights multiple pressures with inconsistent cues and signals leading to variations in practice (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996).

To make sense of homogeneity within an organisation field coupled with the types of change that may occur, scholars suggest that isomorphic change has three mechanisms each with its own antecedents: 1) coercive isomorphism that stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy, 2) mimetic isomorphism resulting from standard responses to uncertainty, and 3) normative isomorphism usually associated with professional bodies and associations (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983:150). Both coercive and mimetic isomorphism is noticeable in institutions in South Asia countries because of the pace of change. Similarly, normative isomorphism occurs as existing rules and laws are perpetuated within professional associations.

Ill-formed and innovative organisational fields tend to develop in response to globalisation. These innovative fields will challenge an existing set of tightly coupled institutional rules and norms (e.g. rules and laws of trade) with low institutional consensus, that are not flexible enough to accommodate export or import norms associated with trade through globalisation. They might also develop out of a direct response to poor and slow responses by Governments to change institutional legislation and laws (such as laws for equal rights). When the benefits of globalisation are not equally transparent, this may heighten the development of an innovative field (such as non government organisations in rural areas). Innovative and radical change occurs in the early stage of the field's life cycle. However, as the field becomes more established, institutional theory suggests that an organisations structures and systems come to increasingly reflect the rules and values legitimized within the state (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996).

There are four affects of isomorphic change of globalisation on gender relations: 1) pressures for global legitimacy, 2) rapid change followed by convergent change, 3) dysfunctional fields, and 4) coercive isomorphism. Pressures for global legitimacy: Global pressures on South Asia governments and their institutions create pressures on these institutions to imitate their global counterparts. This resembles mimetic isomorphism. At the macro level, governments radically organise by bringing in new laws and regulations to allow foreign direct investment so that change is visible in finance and investment, banking, and trade. Legislation and change for women is not among these changes – change in these areas is only convergent (e.g. affirmative action legislation) in order to satisfy international community concerns that equal rights is at least a policy agenda 2) Rapid change followed by convergent change: While rapid change at the macro level occurs in institutional fields that allow FDI and economic transformation in some institutions, this is not widespread across institutions. At the meso and micro level represented mostly by existing organisations and hundreds of small micro communities, change is convergent. This resembles institutional isomorphism. At best, there is only fine tuning of some existing programs such as labour laws benefiting export jobs (Kabeer, 2011; Yoganandan, 2010). At the macro level, no new legislation is enacted related to equal rights for women. There are no increased benefits from rapid growth in GDP in programs related to education and health which have the most impact on women 3) Dysfunctional Fields: Dysfunctional organisational fields at the micro level are created because there is low institutional consensus and little agreement about the kind of functions and systems that should be established for the benefit of entire communities. Existing laws and regulations only favour some (such as the wealthy and elite in society) at the expense of the majority. Corruption is widespread in government and community in South Asia (Kabeer, 2011; Rahman and Wiest, 2002), and women have increasingly had to mobilise into action groups such as non government organisations to challenge existing orthodoxy and promote the rights of women: 4) Coercive Isomorphism - In an effort to cope, coercive isomorphism becomes more salient as local institutions (e.g. national Governments) attempt to rationalise their responses to globalisation by perpetuation and or fine tuning structures and systems that reflect legitimized rules

within the state. In an effort to gain legitimacy, while some South Asian countries have joined CEDAW and have complied in a superficial way by allowing more women into Parliament, established practices of law and culture (such as Hindu, Christian and Moslem law, traditional culture rules of family, strong religious values tied to the employment of work) and business practices (such as work values tied to employee expectations) continue to impoverish the rights of women and men.

Khilji (2004) in her study of six Pakistani organisations and the effects of organisational culture on HR satisfaction found that most HR practices involved piecemeal transformation. While “national values remain rooted in tradition, employees’ work-related values reveal changes reflecting a modern market economy (2004: p. 142). Interestingly, she found that a younger generation of employees had adopted modern work values and expectations than other workers that had adopted traditional values, suggesting that in organisational fields characterised by relatively large organisations, there was a level of heterogeneity starting to emerge in work values. Similarly, across South Asia organisations generally, there has been an extremely slow response to world standards in education for women, maternal and adolescent rates in health standards, female labour force participation and female shares in parliament (Gray et al., 2006; HDR 2011). This suggests that organisations representing a larger field of communities have been slow to respond to new global values. This is borne out in the Gender Inequality Index as outlined earlier. Moreover, a separate study by Faisal and Rizavi (2011) of 300 educated female Pakistani employees in 24 different public sector organizations found that very few women reached the top management tiers of their organisation. The results found that public policies have been mere “statements of commitment and that no meaningful reforms had materialized with gender interventions becoming trivialized as programs undertaken at the behest of international donors with little or no local ownership and support” (2011: 358). Most studies of government policy related to NGO programs and access to micro credit found that these programs failed to reach the poorest (Mumtaz ,2006: 1). Similarly in India, multiple studies have found high inequality in both export oriented and non-export states simultaneously (Arora, 2012; Kaur, 2010; Forsythe et al., 2003). In fact, Forsythe et al. (2003) found that macroeconomic policies including changes in trade policy do not

explain gender inequality, and that expenditure on education had a much larger affect on gender equity. Similarly, more expenditure on schooling and health was related to higher gender equity than increases in GDP in other studies (Schultz, 2005). Similar to Bangladesh, women in India have had to increasingly mobilize into non government organisations just to establish basic rights.

The corollary of mimetic isomorphism is more homogeneity and more of the same reflecting a greater impact of institutional coercive isomorphism. Changes to gender inequality at the fringes by imitating and taking on globalisation values resemble a more convergent change approach. That is, fine tuning existing structures appears to resemble the great majority of organisational fields in South Asian countries. Isomorphic processes in schools, education and access to higher education including the lack of labour mobility for women reflect institutional values and belief systems that make women more dependent on homogenous structures and systems in organisational fields. Increased female wages in largely export firms equating to low inequality and increasing female employment has helped some women however peripheral changes in organisational fields do not mask the powerlessness and silencing of women along class and gender lines (Modi, 2012; Kabeer ,2011, Lucy et al., 2008).

Hypothesis 6: Changes or improvements in gender equity resemble radical change early within an organisation field's life cycle and convergent change as the field becomes more established;

Hypothesis 7: Specific benefits for women have not materialised due to dysfunctional organisation fields and mimetic isomorphism;

Hypothesis 8: The pressure to imitate a global organisation field leads to a push towards homogenization in structure, culture and output meaning that gender contributions are marginalised by institutional isomorphism.

Gender, Globalisation and Strategies for Change

Social structures of gender are intrinsically linked to the legal, political and cultural traditions as we have discussed meaning that at the governmental level, more gender diverse policies are required to help women become an equal player with men in society in recognition of the important contribution they play in economic activity. Accordingly women need a socially constructed mechanism by which mainstream gendering transforms their lives at the same time women are challenging long-standing traditions. As much as multi-level frameworks of diversity offer clues for analysing multiple gendered struggles, these are more likely to be realised in contexts that see a gradual and incremental shift in inclusion and participation along broader gendered lines. While multi-level frameworks such as those at the micro-level offer useful analysis of cause-effect relations for individual influences on equal opportunity related to individual agency and multiple identities (Syed and Özbilgin, 2009: 2445; Syed and Murray, 2009), they are less focused as a decision making interaction. Here, the discussion explores how socially mobilised groups (SMGs) take shape through communities. More direct decision making is required by groups of women to challenge the traditions of the state that keep women powerless. In past studies, these are known as non government organisations (NGOs) (Kabeer, 2011; Lucy, Ghosh and Kujawa, 2008; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). These NGOS and their capacity to change the status quo are different however across South Asia countries and depend on the level of governance and federalism of the state.

In Bangladesh, the rise of NGOs has been borne out of the unequal access to land favouring powerful elites giving rise to a limited and uneven spread of markets with limited opportunities for women. Moreover, the link between the rural elite and the state reproduced inequality and widespread corruption. The effects of globalisation on South Asia countries and the inability of organisation fields to rapidly reorganise led to the rise of NGOs. Representing the poor and marginalised groups, NGOs have been a mechanism for these groups to participate and expand women's autonomy. However as Kabeer explained, these social networks "were played out in conditions of extreme poverty and widespread illiteracy...[with families]....organised along corporate patriarchal lines....[and that]....the vast majority of them have gravitated towards service provision...[with their]....impacts being

restricted to changes at the individual level with little evidence of a collective struggle for social justice.” (2011: 505-506). In more recent times, NGOs in Bangladesh - as distinct from NGOs in almost every country across South Asia countries (Kaur, 2010; Gray et al., 2006; Patel, 2006) – have committed to a radical agenda (radical change) of social transformation tackling the structures of class and patriarch (Kabeer, 2011; Lucy, Ghosh and Kujawa, 2008). The important difference between the latter NGOs with a social justice agenda has been different to normal NGOs that are restricted through cultural and social mores. Accordingly, I separate NGOs as presenting distinct autonomous opportunities for women into two types: 1) Those largely dictated to by powerful elites and dominant communities, and 2) Socially Mobilized Groups (SMGs). That is, those that are mobilised around radical change and social justice. Based on this research, I believe it is the latter in South Asia countries that best represent the context-specific interests that women face across multiple competing social, cultural, and political forces. These SMGs will connect to organisations at the meso level because organisations such as multi-nationals want women to be educated and socially mobile so that they are more likely to stay at work. Similarly, powerful SMGs can influence Government policy by voicing strong collective action across communities. Since SMGs have a social justice agenda and make decisions representing communities as a whole, they are the main mechanism by which gender mainstreaming can take root through a social construction approach connecting the macro, meso and micro levels.

Socially mobilized groups or SMGs are defined by 1) individual decisions to break free of patriarchal organisation, 2) the capacity to gain material benefits and win concessions from other groups and family, 3) self reliance, status, and voice, 4) ongoing reflection of learning, action, experience, observation and analysis, 5) the benefits of sharing life experiences and seeking solutions to common problems, 6) regular face to face interactions 7) training in conflict and dispute resolution, 8) monitoring and overseeing of public goods and services that flow to the correct beneficiaries, and 9) collective action as a protest group to raise issues with the government of social injustices and inequality (see also Arora ,2012; Modi 2012; Kabeer, 2011, Kaur ,2010, Mushtaq ,2009; Gray et al.,

2006). There are also more recent examples of SMGs in India. One SMG called Ashta No Kai (ANK) is a small community based grassroots organization working in 10 villages of the Pune District to demonstrate how using pro-poor, pro-women strategies can lead to social transformation for rural women (Modi 2012: p. 308). In addition to social justice agendas as previously highlighted, the second emerging reality in SMGs is their capacity to make decisions that make a difference for women. For example, the ANK group bring pressure on officials when requests are not followed through. Women are increasingly active in village affairs, they take collective action to address social and community issues and participate in village assemblies. In recent times, they have also led campaigns for better infrastructure such as bad roads, have challenged early marriage schemes, and have gained power through increasing access to credit programs (Modi, 2012). Collectively, SMGs (as distinct from NGOs) represent the best opportunity to connect the macro, meso and micro levels in which gender differences are acted out and reinforced.

In both Pakistan and India, much of the capacity for women to change things is dependent on the level of Federalism and how it is applied in the state plus the large differentiation that exists across states (Arora, 2012; Mushtaq, 2009; Patel, 2006) at the macro level. Non government organisations at the community level are best able to represent the large majority of women in poorer agricultural communities and/or urban communities. However, as discussed, these are not based on social justice agendas and regularly conform to the rationalisation of existing organisational forms. And this seems to vary according to power structures and central governance which has marginalised and alienated certain communities. For instance, although the Muslim league passed an historical resolution in 1940 that Pakistan would become autonomous and sovereign, this advocacy has seldom occurred because of the constitutional and political history of the nation (Mustaq, 2009: 279). Subsequently, advocacy towards increasing decentralisation by the Bengalis, the Sindhis, the Pashtuns and the Baloch conflicts with the custodians of power: the Punjabis. This means that the Federal Government can intervene in a province “to protect it from internal disturbance” (2009: 292). This suggests that increasing efforts towards gender mainstreaming may well depend on the strengthening of gender legislation and the

deepening of the democratic process. However, this may be less likely with the current ruling elite. As well, the large degree of ethnic groups across Pakistan suggests that more accommodation of ethnic identities and distributive justice is required. The continued isolation of democracy resembles coercive isomorphism given the rationalisation of rules of state are less likely to embrace quite radical change agendas such as legislation for equal rights.

Hypothesis 9: Socially mobile groups (SMGs) represent the best chance for women in society to address issues of poverty, women's rights, and access to resources that enhance women's living standards;

Hypothesis 10: SMGs are more likely to represent a socially structured mechanism by which women can voice concerns and influence decisions at the macro, meso and micro level.

Discussion and Conclusions

India has emerged as the strongest of the developing nations in terms of globalisation and arguably this is due to a more decentralised form of government enabling more rapid response to global pressures. In both Bangladesh and Pakistan, coercive isomorphism is more noticeable and it is this form of rationalisation around existing structures and systems at the macro, meso and micro level that potentially threaten any lasting change attempts towards gender mainstreaming. However, there are quite radical attempts through SMGs to tackle gender bias and to lift the rights of working women through a more direct decision making effort in these groups but these are mostly evident in rural communities. Much less is known about women in urban communities. An important point to note is that although NGOs (as distinct from SMGs) are increasingly widespread, over ninety percent of groups are not organised along social justice and decision making agendas (Modi, 2012; Kabeer, 2011). Consequently, and perhaps simultaneously, coercive isomorphism is a powerful force that conflicts with the forces for global integration and the benefits that might stem from the application of

a more diverse range of policies implemented at the macro and meso levels that could have a flow-on effect to community.

At the meso level, there is evidence that HR policies influence greatly mainstream gendering in South Asia communities. A study of diversification and inclusion more recently reinforces the call by many diversity and gender scholars to contextualise policies to local conditions based on historical, social and cultural antecedents (Forbes Insights, 2012). For instance, Ericsson, the global communications multi-national changes its policies of diversity to suit the local country conditions. In India for instance where gender diversity is low, the priority has been to recruit and retain Indian talent. Accordingly, the company has introduced maternity leave of 12 weeks to encourage women to return to work.

Similarly, the company offers flexitime hours for three months after a woman returns to work. This is in addition to day-care facilities, an allowance for working mothers, a reimbursement of 5000 rupees when a child reaches three years of age and investments in education and health (2012: 29). Multi-national organisations need to contextualise their diversity and gender policies to take account of the lived experiences of working women. It is noted throughout this paper that education and health emerge as powerful forces to liberate women out of poverty and to increase equal rights. Accordingly, policies that actually help women to stay at work by recognising the family and community forces that influence their lives are critical. Thus, the micro level needs to be connected to the meso level in ways that advantage women. Human resource policies at the meso level will be aimed at women in SMGs who have taken advantage of educational opportunities arranged through these groups to the extent that women are more empowered and confident. Multi-national organisations in the future should look for opportunities to sponsor SMGs in ways that benefit both organisation and community.

At the macro level, much can be done beyond mimetic isomorphism in globalisation fields to change the lives of women. More legislation along race, colour, religion, and sex are required. Governments could establish non government associations to monitor the implementation of gender and diversity programs. New legislation could be passed similar to most advanced nations of Equal Rights for

Working Women to tackle discrimination at work. Governments could appoint an Equal Rights Commissioner at Federal levels. Governments could also establish semi-government agencies to monitor the working rights of women, run national conferences on women in community and at the same time develop new laws that have mandatory requirements at the meso level. Governments should encourage more socially mobile groups at the grassroots level of community rather than NGOs that have little muscle power. This may be in recognition that broader policies for change including new laws take time and that SMGs represent socially interactive opportunities for women to construct and reconstruct their identities in ways that empower them. Overall however, governments must ensure that the benefits of globalisation and export receipts enable increased funding of key programs in health and education among others.

In this paper, globalisation has helped to lift women out of poverty through greater access to export jobs and by an increased recognition by South Asia countries that women have a powerful role to play in society. However, beyond these changes, the benefits of increased economic growth and income have not flowed through to women especially those in poor urban and regional communities. These women in particular are increasingly subject to discriminatory practices along social, cultural and religious lines. Those tied to patriarchal communities in particular appear to be significantly impoverished and this represents the great majority. South Asian countries have embraced globalisation mainly on the basis of mimetic isomorphism by legitimising existing organisational fields. Quite radical change has occurred at the macro level in response to globalisation. Convergent and fine tuning however describes most activities in South Asia particularly in the case of mainstream gendering and legislative benefits have not followed. Based on the discussions of this paper, there are very few instances of mainstream gendering except by women themselves in micro communities. While change in an institutional field resembles mimetic isomorphism at the start of globalisation, there is a push towards homogenization as the field becomes established (institutional isomorphism) leading to homogeneity in structure, culture and output (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983). The benefits for women are tied to export jobs (World Development Report 2012) but these are highly gendered.

While improvements are noted across the developed world in health and education more generally when international conventions are followed (e.g. joining CEDAW), this is not really noticeable in South Asia countries.

Social relations have been advanced through group-based approaches in some South Asian countries in such a way that sense of self and identity is not predetermined (Kabeer, 2011; Patel 2006). Rather, these communities have advanced the rights of women by challenging preordained in-group assumptions about women's roles. Consequently, a sense of identity and self is constantly in the process of construction and reconstruction through the social interactions of everyday life (2011: 504). This is mainly the case for SMGs rather than NGOs. The paper has illustrated how these groups become mobile and powerful, challenging the gendered traditions and practices in homogeneous settings. The reality that women become more autonomous in these new roles and improve their agency in economic production places the rise of SMGs in South Asia as important and necessary. It is within the functioning and structures of the latter that this paper has attempted to make a significant contribution. Further, institutional isomorphism is a useful way to assess the impact on global organisation fields and to determine whether existing changes are merely mimetic or long-lasting where the benefits from globalisation are able to be equally shared.

Limitations of the Research

Future research should clearly establish the isomorphic limitations on gender mainstreaming in South Asia countries given that the effects of globalisation is far-reaching in these societies. Given that there is a lack of research on socially mobile groups, government legislators at the macro level and managers at the meso level require accurate assessments about the gendering of society both at work and in community; more information is needed about how SMGs empower women in ways that address the inequality balance in highly gendered situations. Future research should connect the

feminization of women in society to Government policies aimed at lifting women out of poverty and improving gendered situations at work.

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