

# Impact of globalization on rural women in India: Cultural, Emotional and Digital Transformation

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**Abstract**— Globalization has reshaped rural India not just in terms of economy, but in the everyday lives of women navigating cultural and digital transitions. This qualitative study draws on NGO reports, government documents, and case studies to explore how rural women experience globalization as both opportunity and disruption. Thematic analysis reveals three key patterns: cultural tension, emotional stress, and the digital divide. Young women often embrace digital tools and new aspirations, while older women face emotional disconnect and struggle with changing norms. Despite gradual shifts, resistance and identity conflicts persist. The study argues that rural women must be seen not only as economic contributors but as emotional and cultural agents. Inclusive policies and digital literacy initiatives are essential for their holistic empowerment in a rapidly globalizing world.

**Keywords**— Globalization, Rural women, India, Cultural, Emotional, Digital transformation, Education, Empowerment.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 19th century, the concept of globalization has gained significant attention across the world. But what does globalization truly mean? Globalization refers to the increasing interconnection and interdependence among countries in terms of economy, culture, politics, and technology. It is the process through which borders become more permeable to the exchange of goods, services, ideas, and practices, thereby reshaping societies on multiple levels. In India, globalization has been a transformative phenomenon that has brought widespread changes in the economy, politics, and social structure. With the introduction of the Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) reforms in 1991, India witnessed rapid integration with the global economy. This resulted in the influx of foreign investment, a surge in multinational corporations, and the growing influence of global media. While urban centres embraced these changes quickly and seamlessly, the impact in rural areas has been more complex and layered, particularly in the lives of rural women.

Rural women form an integral part of India's development process. Their contributions, especially in agriculture, handicrafts, and domestic labour, are substantial. Yet, their lives remain shaped by challenges such as limited access to education and healthcare, patriarchal norms, and financial dependency. Globalization has introduced new tools, ideas, and opportunities that bring both possibilities and challenges. On the one hand, it inspires aspirations, but on the other, it creates cultural tensions and emotional

struggles. For instance, when rural women are exposed to urban lifestyles and global media, they often develop new aspirations. Some women embrace these changes as sources of empowerment and self-expression, while others experience guilt, anxiety, and identity conflicts. A common example is clothing young women, after seeing images of jeans or modern attire on television or mobile devices, may seek to adopt such styles. However, this often triggers resistance from their families, communities, and sometimes even from within themselves.

The cultural dimension of globalization is especially pronounced. Traditional norms related to clothing, marriage age, and women's mobility are challenged by new ideals that globalization promotes. Young rural women often develop a hybrid identity, attempting to balance respect for their traditions with the desire to embrace modernity. This cultural negotiation frequently generates intergenerational tensions, as older generations perceive new ideas as threats to cultural values, while younger women interpret them as pathways to greater freedom.

The digital dimension represents one of the most visible impacts of globalization. The rapid spread of mobile phones, internet access, and social media platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook has opened new avenues for rural women. While some women use these tools for education, business, and self-expression, others remain excluded due to the digital divide and digital illiteracy. This disparity further reflects the uneven

impact of globalization across different sections of rural society.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the impact of globalization on rural women, focusing specifically on changes in their emotional, cultural, and digital lives. It explores how globalization shapes their aspirations, interpersonal relationships, and engagement with digital tools. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to move beyond conventional studies that primarily examine globalization through economic or employment-related lenses. Instead, it highlights the cultural and emotional experiences of rural women experiences of resistance, adaptation, and transformation that are rarely documented. Recognizing these dimensions is crucial for designing inclusive policies and programs that genuinely address the needs and realities of rural women in a globalized world. This research employs a descriptive and qualitative methodology, as its primary focus is to understand and interpret the emotional, cultural, and digital experiences of rural women. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of lived experiences and facilitates an understanding of the broader narrative context of rural women's lives.

The study is based on secondary sources, including reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government publications, and systematic analyses of media articles. Through these sources, the impact of globalization on rural women is examined, and relevant themes are identified. Globalization is a complex phenomenon, and the lives of rural women reflect this complexity. Development, therefore, cannot be understood solely in terms of technological progress or educational attainment. It must also be framed within the broader cultural context, where the ability to accept and adapt to new ideas and practices plays a critical role in enabling rural women to navigate and compete in an increasingly globalized world.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural women constitute a large section of India's population, yet their voices remain largely unheard in academic discourse. The impact of globalization on rural women is frequently discussed in policy and scholarly circles; however, most of the existing research is employment-centric, often sidelining the emotional, cultural, and digital dimensions of their lives. Globalization has transformed rural women's

experiences not only in economic but also in cultural and emotional terms, influencing their sense of identity, belonging, and aspirations. Hence, a review of literature is crucial to trace how globalization affects rural women beyond the limited framework of GDP and employment, while also highlighting how patriarchal norms restrict their access to its benefits.

### **1. Rangoli Chandra (2015) *Globalization and Its Impact on Rural Women***

This study provides a broad overview of globalization's effects at political, social, and economic levels. It argues that rural women encounter new opportunities; however, patriarchal structures limit their access to these opportunities. The limitation of this study lies in its absence of case studies or empirical data on emotional and cultural transformations, and it also neglects the personal narratives of rural women.

### **2. Dr. K. Kaliyamurthy (2015) *Impact of Globalization on Rural Development in India***

This paper assesses the role of rural women in the informal sector and their contribution to rural development. Kaliyamurthy explains that globalization improves infrastructure and market access in rural areas, yet rural women continue to work primarily in informal, insecure jobs. A key shortcoming is that the paper does not explore emotional stress, cultural identity conflicts, or issues of digital literacy.

### **3. Dr. Sohail Akhtar (2025) *Impact of Globalization on Indian Women in Attaining Social and Economic Opportunities***

This study focuses on gender equality, highlighting that globalization has expanded opportunities such as education and employment, particularly for urban women, and to some extent for rural women. However, rural women's representation in these domains remains limited. While the study briefly mentions the digital divide, it lacks a detailed analysis of cultural and emotional experiences.

### **4. UN Women Report (2023)**

The report emphasizes that the benefits of globalization can reach rural women only through access to education, digital tools, and social support. However, in countries such as India, this access remains uneven. While the report is globally relevant, it lacks India-specific data and cultural insights.

## 5. SEWA Foundation Report (2024)

Focusing on digital literacy, the report shows how mobile phones and internet access enhance financial and social empowerment among rural women, with Self-Help Group (SHG) training boosting their confidence. Nevertheless, the report offers limited insights into cultural shifts and emotional impacts.

## 6. Scroll.in and The Hindu Articles

Media reports highlight how rural women absorb new knowledge and ideas from television and mobile platforms, sometimes resulting in emotional anxiety and identity confusion. While these reports provide valuable anecdotal evidence, they remain outside the scope of systematic academic analysis.

## 7. ICSSR Studies on Cultural Shifts

These studies document cultural changes in rural India triggered by globalization, such as evolving dress codes, marriage practices, and greater female mobility. However, the research does not sufficiently address intersectional perspectives or the emotional negotiations women must undertake in navigating these changes.

## 8. World Bank Data on Rural Gender Gaps

Statistical data indicate that rural women's labour force participation has stagnated after globalization, while gender wage gaps and unpaid labour remain pressing issues. Although the data-driven approach offers a valuable macro-perspective, it lacks qualitative insights into women lived realities.

## 9. Academic Journals on Intersectionality

Research—employing intersectionality frameworks emphasizes how factors such as caste, class, and marital status shape rural women's experiences of globalization. However, most of these works remain theoretical, without sufficiently incorporating ground-level narratives and the emotional dimension of women lived experiences.

### Research gap

- Less material on emotional impact
- Cultural negotiation and hybrid identity is rarely explored
- Digital divide term use for as access not for creativity and confidence
- Ignore intersectionality
- Ground level voice is missing
- Explanation of different themes

## Emotional Impact

Globalization has altered the aspirations of rural women, yet it often fails to provide the resources necessary to fulfil these new dreams. Chandra (2025) notes that media exposure creates fresh ambitions, but when these aspirations clash with ground realities, they often result in emotional stress. Akhtar (2025) argues that globalization fosters empowerment; however, for many rural women, it also produces confusion and guilt. Palriwala's (2018) ethnographic study highlights generational tensions, where young women seek to redefine their roles while older women resist, dismissing these changes as "Parampara ke Khilaaf" (against tradition). This friction creates emotional fractures, as women struggle between belonging and autonomy. Sonkar (2021) links digital literacy with emotional agency, suggesting that the confident use of digital tools strengthens women's self-worth. Understanding these emotional dimensions is critical, as globalization induces not only external change but also deep internal conflicts.

## Cultural Transformation

Research on globalization and rural India has shown that cultural change is gradual, contested, and layered. ICSSR (2023) reports that norms regarding clothing, marriage, and mobility are shifting slowly in rural areas. Sharma (2022) identifies the emergence of a hybrid identity, where women blend traditional values with global ideas. Postcolonial theorists such as Spivak (1998) and Mohanty (2003) argue that cultural negotiation operates as both resistance and adaptation, reflecting a dynamic engagement with globalization. SEWA field reports note that changing clothing styles and workplace practices are visible, yet decisions remain influenced by izzat (honour) and samajik chhavi (social image). Singh and Kumari (2021) observe that media exposure redefines gender roles, though these transformations are uneven across the urban-rural divide. Overall, cultural transformation is not linear but complex and multi-layered, positioning rural women as active agents who negotiate, resist, and adapt within their cultural spaces.

## Digital Engagement

Digital literacy has emerged as a crucial tool of empowerment for rural women. Sonkar (2021) suggests that digital competence strengthens both emotional autonomy and decision-making power. Pratham (2024) highlights that platforms such as WhatsApp and YouTube are enabling rural women to expand their



learning and entrepreneurial opportunities. Nevertheless, the World Bank (2023) stresses that the digital divide is deeply gendered, particularly disadvantaging older women and those with low literacy levels. Reports from SEWA training programs demonstrate that while women have learned to use mobile phones, they often lack confidence in online banking, e-learning, and other advanced applications. Sonkar (2021) further emphasizes that digital confidence is intrinsically tied to emotional autonomy; when women feel secure online, they assert themselves more confidently in household and community decisions. Thus, true empowerment through digital access requires not only connectivity but also confidence, creativity, and cultural acceptance. This suggests that digital literacy reshapes not just opportunities but also emotional and cultural landscapes. Globalization is experienced as a paradox for rural women. It opens new avenues for aspirations and agency, yet pursuing these opportunities often comes at emotional and cultural costs. Literature demonstrates that rural women are not passive recipients of globalization but rather active participants who negotiate, resist, and adapt to shifting socio-economic realities.

## METHODOLOGY

This research employs a descriptive and qualitative approach. The descriptive dimension is intended to provide detailed explanations of the features, contexts, and patterns observed, while the qualitative aspect centres the study on the emotional, cultural, and digital dimensions of globalization, which are best understood through interpretation and narratives rather than numerical analysis. The study is based entirely on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles (2000–2025), NGO reports (SEWA, Pratham, ActionAid), government publications (MWCD, NSSO, Digital India Mission), media reports (Scroll.in, The Hindu, IndiaSpend), and international reports (UN Women, World Bank, IMF). Such sources provide a diverse and multi-layered perspective on rural women's experiences. For data collection, content analysis has been applied. Selected documents were systematically read, coded, and categorized in order to identify recurring themes. Thematic coding focused on critical keywords such as aspiration, hybrid identity, generational tension, and empowerment. Each theme was broken down into sub-themes and interpreted within its cultural and social context. This methodology highlights the complexity of rural women's engagement

with globalization across emotional, cultural, and digital domains.

## Study plan

1	• Objective of study
2	• Context of study
3	• Introduction and rationale
4	• Literature review
5	• Findings
6	• Discussion
7	• Conclusion

## Study plan for research

### Findings:

Globalization has introduced new possibilities for rural women through increased exposure to urban lifestyles and global success stories via social media, television, and mobile phones. However, when these possibilities collide with local limitations, they often generate emotional strain. SEWA (2024) reports that many women learn skills such as cooking or tailoring from YouTube, but their families frequently discourage them from monetizing these skills. Such aspirational stress reflects not only disappointment but also identity-level conflict, where women begin to see themselves as role models but find their horizons constrained by social and cultural boundaries.

### Generational Conflict

The emotional consequences of globalization become more complex when viewed across generations. Younger women embrace ideas such as delayed marriage, career-oriented aspirations, and modern clothing, while older women dismiss such changes as "Parampara ke Khilaaf" (against tradition). ICSSR (2023) illustrates how mothers often believe their daughters neglect culture, while daughters feel their individuality is disregarded. These generational divides produce emotional rifts marked by guilt and misunderstanding, affecting not only values but also a sense of emotional belonging.

### Empowerment vs. Isolation

Tools of globalization including mobile phones, SHG training, and online learning undoubtedly empower women, yet empowerment sometimes leads to social

isolation. For example, a rural woman who becomes financially independent by creating a YouTube cooking channel may be viewed negatively by relatives, who perceive her as “too modern” or “not sanskari.” This illustrates how empowerment and exclusion can coexist, revealing the complex societal negotiations women must navigate.

### ***Cultural Transformation***

Globalization has also altered marriage practices, clothing, and mobility. Young women now wear jeans or kurtis to college and travel independently for education. Pratham (2024) observes that many girls express interest in vocational training, though their parents continue to prioritize marriage. Phrases like “Padhi likhi hogi to achha ghar milega” (education ensures a good marriage) reflect how deeply education remains framed within patriarchal expectations. MWCD (2023) further notes that women report, “ab humse koi mashwara nahi leta” (now nobody consults us), signaling feelings of exclusion and cultural insecurity. These examples reveal that cultural transformation remains fragmented; while visible changes occur, deep-rooted social norms retain their strength.

### ***Hybrid Identity***

Many rural women negotiate a hybrid identity, balancing tradition with modernity. A woman may begin her day with puja and aarti before creating Instagram reels, symbolizing the coexistence of cultural devotion and aspirational expression. Sharma (2022) argues that such hybrid identities allow women to redefine their roles in contextually compatible ways. However, this blending often appears as a “character change” to society, compelling women to conceal their personal choices leading to emotional fatigue.

### ***Digital Engagement***

Digital access enables rural women to connect with global communities and diversify livelihood options through home-based enterprises like pickle-making or embroidery. Yet low literacy and limited digital skills restrict their engagement. Most women primarily use mobile phones for video calls, entertainment, and photography. World Bank (2023) reports that only 18% of rural women feel confident in digital usage, with Dalit and tribal women facing even greater barriers due to lack of training. Many express fears of making mistakes online or being ridiculed. These anxieties illustrate that digital exclusion is not only technological but also deeply social and emotional.

### **DISCUSSION**

Globalization emerges as a paradox for rural women: while it provides exposure to opportunities and tools of empowerment, it also imposes emotional burdens and risks of social exclusion. Women pursue new aspirations but struggle with the absence of resources and familial support. They attempt to adopt new roles, yet societal acceptance remains limited. The narratives reveal that empowerment cannot be understood in isolation from its emotional costs. Rural women engage in constant negotiation adapting, compromising, and resisting rather than passive assimilation. ICSSR notes that women often seek parental permission for education rather than openly rebelling, signifying resilience that is invisible in statistical data. The digital divide is more than infrastructural; it is shaped by social norms. MWCD reports that 42% of rural women avoid using their phones in public to prevent gossip, underscoring that digital exclusion is as much an emotional and cultural issue as it is a logistical one. Effective policies must therefore prioritize confidence-building, privacy, and emotional safety alongside digital distribution. Media narratives also tend to simplify rural women’s realities, portraying them only as oppressed or empowered. In reality, women’s lives are marked by contradictions resistance and compromise, empowerment and isolation, tradition and modernity which must be understood in all their complexity.

### **CONCLUSION**

Globalization has profoundly transformed the cultural, digital, and emotional lives of rural women. It has fostered new aspirations and identities but also imposed emotional strains and cultural tensions. Rural women should be recognized not as passive subjects but as emotional and cultural agents, constantly negotiating between tradition and modernity, and between belonging and autonomy. This study suggests that empowerment is not a linear outcome but an ongoing process. Women may feel empowered in some spaces yet excluded in others, simultaneously embracing change while mourning the losses it entails. Policy frameworks must therefore acknowledge this complexity, moving beyond economic indicators to address women’s cultural confidence, emotional safety, and digital autonomy. Future research should incorporate participatory communication and emotional mapping methods to foreground women’s voices. Rural women must not only be studied but also heard their stories must be treated as dialogues capable of generating meaningful change.

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