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Q19

Globalization has increased urban migration by skilled, young, unmarried women from various classes. How has this trend impacted upon their personal freedom and relationship with family?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · GS I · 15 marks · Women, Population and Urbanisation

Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Core demand of the question

- Note the trend of urban migration by skilled, young, unmarried women under globalisation
- Analyse the impact on their personal freedom and on relationships with family

Revision summary

Globalisation pulled young unmarried women into urban garments, care, hospitality, and IT-enabled work.

The stream cuts across classes, from professionals to shop-floor workers.

Personal freedom grows through wages, delayed marriage, and city skills.

It remains bounded by curfews, street risk, precarious contracts, and digital surveillance by kin.

Families often allow the move for remittances while keeping honour and marriage as levers.

The relationship is renegotiated. It is not simply broken and not simply liberated.

Introduction

After economic liberalisation, many young unmarried women moved to Indian cities for work in garments, care, hospitality, and IT-enabled services. Globalisation expanded those sectors. The stream includes skilled and semi-skilled women from more than one class, not only the metropolitan elite. They send money home and live in hostels, paying-guest rooms, and shared flats. The move has increased personal freedom in some ways. It has also forced families to renegotiate control. Patriarchy has not simply ended.

Body

The trend

After liberalisation, cities demanded nurses, teachers, BPO staff, designers, boutique and mall workers, and graduate professionals. Air travel, mobiles, and women's education, still uneven, made a solo or all-woman move thinkable. Kerala's nurses abroad were an earlier template. The 2000s added NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, and garment clusters. Women move as students then workers, or straight to a contract. Class matters. A software engineer and a garment tailor share the city and not the same safety net. Both, if unmarried, sit outside the

old script that a woman leaves home only for her husband's house.

- **Sectors:** Care, garments, services, and IT are global production networks that hire many women.
- **Demography:** The movers are young and unmarried, so the move is not yet folded into marriage.
- **Class mix:** There is not a single new woman. Several class positions sit in one statistic.

Personal freedom

A wage in her account, a phone, and a lock on a paying-guest door can mean mobility, delayed marriage, choice of clothes and friends, and the right to refuse a match. Public transport, night shifts, and paying-guest life teach the city. Freedom is real and conditional. Hostels impose curfews. Companies police safety as control. The street still punishes. Sexual harassment at work and the fear of being sent back home limit the body. For some, live-in and intercaste relationships become possible. For others, the city only extends family control through a brother who calls every evening.

- **Gains:** Income, skills, delayed marriage, and a self that is not only a daughter.
- **Limits:** Safety costs, moral policing, precarious contracts, and no affordable housing.
- **Ambivalence:** Freedom to earn can coexist with no freedom to stay out after eight.

Relationship with family

Families often permit the move because of remittances, dowry-saving, and prestige of a city job. This is a bargain. It is not a conversion to feminism. The daughter remains a duty-bearer. She is still expected to care for parents later, to accept a marriage the family still wants to arrange, and to protect honour that she must not stain. Some households relax after seeing the money. Some tighten surveillance with location apps and sudden visits. Conflict peaks over choice of partner, night work, and whether she will return to the village. Married skilled women in the same stream face a different file of care drain and double shift. For the unmarried, the family relation becomes a long-distance intimate tie even inside one country. Love and control travel by phone.

- **Bargain:** Money and honour are traded daily.
- **Renegotiation:** She may have more say in siblings' education. She may have less say in her own marriage.
- **Not rupture only:** Many women want both the job and the family's blessing.

Globalisation did not free women as a bloc. It opened an urban work path in which freedom and family are rewritten under pressure, class by class.

Flow diagram

Globalised urban jobs -> Young unmarried women migrants
 Young unmarried women migrants -> Wage mobility delayed marriage
 Young unmarried women migrants -> Remittance and family bargain
 Curfew harassment housing -> limits Wage mobility delayed marriage
 Remittance and family bargain -> Honour veto on partner

Conclusion

Skilled young unmarried women in globalised urban work have more income and a wider range of daily choices. Families take the remittance and often keep the veto on marriage and reputation. The trend's honest impact is a contested expansion of freedom. It is not a clean break from kinship. Policy that treats them only as cheap flexible labour, without housing, safety, and portable social security, will take away the freedom that the market claims to sell.

Facts & figures

IT-enabled and garment demand

Post-liberalisation cities expanded BPO, apparel export and organised retail, all of which hired large numbers of young women.

Kerala nursing template

An earlier, well-studied stream of skilled women migrating for care work, later echoed in domestic urban moves.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013

The ICC framework exists because the urban workplace is also a site of unfreedom for women migrants.

Remittances inside India

Women's urban wages often fund rural education, housing and marriage costs, which is why families consent without converting to full autonomy.

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