

# Editors' Introduction

KENNETH BO NIELSEN, KARINA STANDAL, ANNE WALDROP AND HAROLD WILHITE

This special issue on 'family and gender in a globalising India' is based on a seminar on the same topic held in Oslo in early 2016 at the initiative of the Norwegian Network for Asian Studies. The seminar provided the opportunity for several of the contributors to this issue to meet and discuss the ways in which the contradictory trends of globalisation have affected, or have failed to affect, changes to the institutions of family and gender.

It is commonly acknowledged that India has, over the past three decades, been increasingly integrated into globalised markets and flows of ideas, objects, images, people and capital. This has led to profound changes in, for example, the spheres of the economy and cultural production, with global IT and ITES companies setting sail for India, and with Bollywood going truly global. The alluring trope of 'globalising India' is thus often used as a shorthand to subsume a great diversity of economic and socio-cultural changes that have played out on Indian soil over several decades of economic liberalisation. Although necessarily slippery and imprecise, the case studies in the articles that follow use the idea and concept of globalisation as a common frame through which to assess and make sense of the stabilities, slow continuities, as well as the quicker changes that they see occurring in family and gender relations in their specific field sites. The contributions to the issue are all based on fieldwork of considerable duration that has allowed the authors to analyse how global processes interact with particular local societies, and how ordinary people experience, perceive, partake in, and understand the changes that are occurring in everyday life-domains that we see as broadly co-constituted by the institutions of family and gender.

Gender relations in India are often associated with women's status as inferior to men, something which registers in social indicators. Women's participation in the work force is low, maternal mortality is high, literacy among women is considerably lower than among men, and the country's child sex ratio reveals that women are actively discriminated against already in the womb. However, behind such aggregate indicators and statistics lies an enormous diversity. India, after all, has a population a good deal larger than all of Europe combined, and there is enormous variation across regions, communities, classes and contexts. Notions of relatedness that underpin specific arrangements of household, marriage, kin and family are practiced in a variety of ways, and what is common or even hegemonic in the north Indian plains may resonate very poorly with the way these social arrangements work in, say, the Himalayan region, the tribal parts of North-east India, or among various non-Hindu minorities. Nonetheless, across India, the dominant ideal is the joint Hindu family, founded on patriarchal arrangements and

a certain division of both power and responsibility within the family, where men control women's sexuality to secure and reproduce the male lineage. Marriages are conventionally caste-endogamous and village-exogamous, because people that have grown up in the same village regard one another as related, and in many places actually refer to one another as agnates. Wives are most often recruited from outside the village. As they move into the natal households of their husbands and his parents they are expected to perform household chores along with other women in the family, as well as producing and nurturing children, preferably sons. Men, on the other hand, are cast as protectors and decision-makers in the family. Though these ideas have been challenged and in some places, especially in the cities, also partially weakened, they still inform practices in many parts of India. And, importantly, they underpin moral discourses about how women and men should and should not behave. Despite—or perhaps because of—the growing impacts of globalisation, religious and nationalist appeals to assert 'traditional' Hindu ways of life in the domains of family and gender also remain a persistent feature of public life and discourse.

In globalising India women and men are thus affected by and manoeuvre between a number of discourses of 'tradition' and 'modernity' that create new opportunities and the possibility for increased agency, yet they may also lead to a backlash for women. In light of this, the articles that follow present close-up case studies of some of the everyday dilemmas that individuals and families experience and navigate as a consequence of the changes that have come with globalisation.

The articles by Førde and Standal deal explicitly with how specific technological aspects of globalisation have affected gender roles and family hierarchies. Førde presents us with a nuanced analysis of surrogacy and its simultaneously empowering and disempowering consequences for the mostly low-income women who work as surrogates in an industry that comes with obvious moral and social dilemmas when viewed through the prism of family and gender. Standal's article shows how the effects of solar energy electrification of rural communities in Uttar Pradesh work as both empowering and disempowering for women. Standal offers a closer look at how electricity enables globalisation through media, smartphones, and community participation in an international development project. Electricity positively affects women's everyday life, but cultural conceptions of women's moral boundaries simultaneously limit their access to using these resources, something which is further accentuated by the view of many international development practitioners that the role of women is primarily that of homemaker and care-giver.

The articles by Ilkjær and Helland focus on urban India. In her contribution, Helene Ilkjær addresses the dilemmas and challenges facing Indian women who return to India after having worked abroad, where gender roles and expectations on employment, dress and housework are quite different from those that they encounter on their return. Grounded in a textured account of one woman's experiences, the article reveals the difficulties of re-adaptation to life in a cosmopolitan Indian city, Bangalore, and also points to ways in which returnee women are courageously changing notions of what it means to be a modern Indian woman. In view of the many positive effects of globalisation on urban, middle-class women in India, Helland examines the extent to which poor women in a resettlement colony in New Delhi have been 'empowered' through the interventions

of a development project. She finds that the project, because it offered vocational training and was for women only, offered a space for building self-worth and community among the women, and thereby offered a sense of increased empowerment. However, as the project did not challenge traditional gender roles and conflated 'gender' with 'women', it did not contribute to altering larger gender structures and offered what could be called 'empowerment' within 'traditional' boundaries.

In their article, Sareen and Manuel take us far from cosmopolitan New Delhi and Bangalore into the remote mountainous areas of the Himalaya, where the reach of globalisation has had quite different and mainly negative consequences for women. They make the point that the development literature has glossed over the multiple dimensions of gendered marginalisation and inequality in Himalayan communities and use an in-depth qualitative study to fill the knowledge gap. Nordfeldt's article is also concerned with conditions in the Himalayan region and engages with changes in gender relations within families that come about because of larger structural factors that are more indirectly linked to globalisation. Nordfeldt shows how increased levels of education among a new generation of women interface with their husband's earning power in a context of increased labour migration, to alter intra-household relations between women, both within and across generations.

Rich in context and representing the great variety that makes up India, the articles of this special issue reveal that the effect of globalisation on gender empowerment, equality, and family organisation varies considerably geographically, and across the urban/rural divide. The cases thus underline the importance of intersectionality and positionality when analysing the multiple effects of globalisation on people's lives – a woman with grown children (especially sons) will, for example, have more autonomy than her younger bahu, and men who are poor or have low religious/caste status, face discrimination comparable to that experienced by women. As several of the cases show, access to new technologies, media and mobility give members of the younger generation access to outside 'globalising' impulses and ideas about the conduct of social relations of all kinds which act as catalysts for change. Still, it seems that the persistent ghosts of poverty, inequality and social status continue to make manifest themselves in everyday life and to shape the ways that globalisation affects many aspects of social, family and gender relations.