

# Custom, Identity, and Migration: The Glocalization of Work Environments in the Global South

Neha Bhardwaj

St. Xavier's School, Kolkata, India  
bhardwaj@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The workplace demographic has undergone significant changes over time, influenced by a combination of factors such as population needs, technological advancements, and evolving workplace requirements. Globalisation factored in immensely with the way workplaces were tailored, shifting from a local focus on both product and employee to a more global outlook. The benefits of doing so involve a more engaged workforce, as well as higher employee satisfaction deriving from the introduction of new policies regarding employee equality and wellbeing. Hence, over time, global companies have recognized the importance of promoting labour equality and creating inclusive workspaces. The paper elaborates on such measures taken by, and the importance of, companies in the creation of inclusive workplaces.*

**Keywords:** MNCs, Gender, Inclusive, Economies

## 1. Introduction

In order to address gender disparities and foster an environment that is culturally sensitive and supportive of diverse employees, businesses employ a variety of measures. These involve implementing policies that ensure fair recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices. Furthermore, by offering flexible work arrangements, parental leave policies, and childcare support, they enable employees, particularly women, to balance work and family responsibilities, which improves an equitable stance of men and women within the organisation. Additionally, by conducting regular pay audits to identify and address gender pay gaps, they further ensure this by focusing on equal compensation. Finally, establishing programs and initiatives to promote diversity at all levels of the organization, as well as providing training on unconscious bias helps create an organisational culture that values different perspectives and experiences. Through an overview of these measures, as well as historical contextualisation and addressal of drawbacks and challenges towards the process of global expansion of local businesses, this paper will discuss the continual changes in work environments in businesses in the Global South.

The relationship between population needs, technological advancements, and workplace requirements shifted with the changes in population demographics and globalisation. After the coming of the Industrial Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a large shift of the workforce from rural to urban areas, following the growing importance of factory-based production methods, was observed.<sup>1</sup> Urbanisation resulted in societal changes, such as population growth, and changing family structures, which influenced the composition and needs of the workforce. In succession, globalisation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the integration of economies and the

rise of multinational corporations. This caused an increase in the outsourcing of jobs, the mobility of labour, and the diversification of the workforce. The 20th century also saw rapid advancements in technology, including the advent of automation, computerization, and digitalization. This led to changes in job requirements and the introduction of new industries.

These changes in economies and demographics led to changes within organisations which can be seen in the way in which diverse and inclusive workforces came to be valued and prioritised.<sup>2</sup> For example, the inclusion of women in the workplace created a significant shift in workplace dynamics. Historically, women have faced barriers to accessing and advancing in the workforce, including gender discrimination, societal expectations, and limited educational and economic opportunities. Employers came to realise that ensuring gender equality in the workplace was not only a matter of social justice but could be deemed to be beneficial for the workplace as a whole. Research has shown that diverse and inclusive work environments lead to increased innovation, better decision-making, and improved organizational performance.<sup>3</sup> Efforts to improve labour demographic equality slowly became widespread, with businesses taking steps to ensure the comfort of their female and family-unit employees, including offering parental leave, and work-from-home and other flexible work arrangements to ensure employee satisfaction across the board.

Another factor determining a shift in workplace needs and

<sup>2</sup> Norton, A. (2017). *Automation and inequality: The changing world of work in the global South*. International Institute for Environment and Development. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep02662>

<sup>3</sup> Deanne K. Hilfinger Messias, Im, E.-O., Page, A., Regev, H., Spiers, J., Yoder, L., & Meleis, A. I. (1997). Defining and Redefining Work: Implications for Women's Health. *Gender and Society*, 11(3), 296–323. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/190404>

<sup>1</sup> Martin, F. E. (2006). INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION. *Landscape Architecture*, 96(7), 56–65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44675621>

culture has been technological progress, which has revolutionized industries and job roles. Automation and digitization have eliminated certain manual and repetitive tasks while creating new jobs that require advanced technical skills. This has led to a shift in an increased demand for technical and specialised skill sets. Furthermore, globally changing market dynamics, evolving consumer preferences, and the need for innovation drive the restructuring of organizations and the creation of new job opportunities. Workplaces now demand adaptability, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity to work in diverse and global environments.

## 2. Background

Asian markets have been rapidly growing and changing since the beginning of the last century. These changes in the economy have been marked by large shifts in demographics which, in turn, have contributed vastly to the changes in workplace dynamics and the ways in which global companies introduce themselves to Asian markets. Asis and Piper (2008) look at the trends, patterns, and impact of migration on markets within Asia. The continent contains some of the world's leading labour-exporting countries-Indonesia, and the Philippines, followed by countries in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>4</sup> Destination countries not only include countries in the West, but also up-and-coming industrial leaders such as Taiwan and Japan.<sup>5</sup> Over the years, beginning in the 1970s, migration within Asia began to become highly feminized, with the number of female migrants from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines outweighing the number of men each year.<sup>6</sup> The majority of the migration that happens to and from Asia is intraregional<sup>7</sup>, which means the largest influx of labour to an Asian country is from other Asian countries. The growing demand for both skilled and unskilled labourers across the world comes with factors such as international brain drain, a phenomenon wherein a country's skilled workforce goes abroad in search of better opportunities. Furthermore, historical mass-migration events, such as the migration of Indian nationals to act as indentured labourers for the British Empire in parts of Côte D'Ivoire and the Seychelles, have led to the growth of large migrant settlements in these areas. Therefore, when making a decision to enter a market, global companies have to consider factors such as migration patterns, and groups of non-native settlements in order to devise the most effective recruitment strategies and ways to make their workplace come across as more attractive to individuals across cultures.

## 3. Discussion

One of the fastest-growing economies in Asia is that of India, with multinational corporations taking the diversity of the population, as well as the rapid advancements in technology in that part of the world into account before

starting a successful integration into the market. Goswami (2007) looks at the shifts in population dynamics following colonialism in the North-East of India.<sup>8</sup> An influx of Bangladeshi Muslims to Assam, as well as illegal immigrants from Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal has led to immense diversity in this region of the country. This is only a small proportion of the country's rich and diverse population, and seeing as such a small region can hold such immense ethnographic disparity, it is no wonder multinationals need to employ different strategies to enter different markets even in different parts of the same country.

Changes in family dynamics may also allow an explanation for the shift from local to multinational companies in India. Thornton and Fricke (1987) offer a comparative perspective on social change and family structures in India.<sup>9</sup> In India, the shift from joint and integrated family structures to a nuclear family has led to shifts in population priorities.<sup>10</sup> Individuals in the workforce no longer look to provide for larger family units, and instead focus on themselves, their spouses, and their children. Without the pressure of providing for more people, employees look towards family benefits and parental leave as factors that lead them to take up an opportunity of employment, rather than maximum pay and overtime. Understanding the changing priorities of the population, especially in women and marginalised communities, helps explain the recent shift of the workforce from local to multinational corporations. Factors such as increased job opportunities, better working conditions, and the potential for upward mobility that multinational companies may offer allow for a more lucrative employment experience for the majority of the population, leading to a shift away from local companies, which may not prioritise employee growth and development in the same way.<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, in the Middle East, women's participation in the workplace has been highly influenced by neoliberal policies, as allowing women to enter the workforce without having them sacrifice their familial duties was the main aim of the government.<sup>12</sup>

Seeing the evidence presented on how changing demographics and shifting priorities have prompted workplaces to adapt and accommodate the evolving needs of their employees, it is important to acknowledge how these factors link with changes in the workplace in the Global South. As women increasingly participate in the workforce, workplaces have responded by implementing policies and practices that accommodate their needs. This includes providing better benefits, childcare facilities, maternity

<sup>8</sup> Goswami, U. (2007). *Internal Displacement, Migration, and Policy in Northeastern India*. East-West Center. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06479>

<sup>9</sup> Thornton, A., & Fricke, T. E. (1987). Social Change and the Family: Comparative Perspectives from the West, China, and South Asia. *Sociological Forum*, 2(4), 746-779. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/684301>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> MAZUMDAR, I., NEETHA, N., & AGNIHOTRI, I. (2013). Migration and Gender in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(10), 54-64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23391360>

<sup>12</sup> Moghadam, V. M. (2005). Women's Economic Participation in the Middle East: What Difference Has the Neoliberal Policy Turn Made? *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1(1), 110-146. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40326851>

<sup>4</sup> Asis, M. M. B., & Piper, N. (2008). Researching International Labor Migration in Asia. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 49(3), 423-444. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40220077>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

leave, flexible work arrangements, and promoting gender equality in career advancement.<sup>13</sup> Shivers-McNair and San Diego (2017) highlight the importance of understanding local contexts and engaging with diverse communities, including migrants.<sup>14</sup> When workplaces experience changes in their employee demographics due to migration patterns, they need to adapt to the needs, expectations, and cultural backgrounds of the incoming workforce. This may involve creating inclusive spaces, providing language support, cultural training, and recognizing the contributions of diverse employees. By doing so, corporations ensure a safe, inclusive, and employee-focused workspace that allows for low employee turnover rates, and high employee satisfaction. Further to this, changes in global markets have led employers to consider an ethical research agenda for international human resource management (HRM) within a plural cosmopolitan framework. Additionally, ethical dimensions in managing a diverse workforce need to be taken into account, which includes recognizing and accommodating the unique needs and priorities of different employee groups.<sup>15</sup> This perspective aligns with the importance of creating inclusive workplaces that respect diverse backgrounds and identities.

In these ways, workplaces have accommodated changes in population dynamics and priorities. By recognizing the roles of women in the economy and household, linking migration patterns to workplace changes, and adopting an ethical approach to HRM practices in diverse settings, workplaces can create an inclusive and supportive environment that fosters employee well-being and productivity.

Changes in workplace dynamics can be attributed to shifts in demographics and familial priorities. As populations evolve, so do the composition and needs of the workforce. The influence of these changes on workplaces is significant and multifaceted.

Demographic shifts, as explored in the work of Thornton and Fricke (1987)<sup>16</sup>, highlight how societal transformations impact family structures and, in turn, shape workplace dynamics. As family priorities change, such as increasing dual-income households or the need for work-life balance, workplaces must adapt to accommodate these evolving needs. This includes implementing policies and practices that support flexible working arrangements, parental leave, childcare facilities, and promoting gender equality.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the context of multinational companies, the importance of localising communities, goals, communication, and

inclusion has been emphasised over the years.<sup>17</sup> Multinationals recognise the value of embracing local cultures and integrating employees from diverse communities, hence creating a more inclusive environment that respects and incorporates local customs, traditions, and values. Efforts to do so may involve adapting office spaces, fostering a sense of belonging, and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

Furthermore, the impact of automation and technological advancements cannot be overlooked. As jobs become automated, new skills and roles emerge, requiring workplaces to adapt and provide opportunities for retraining and upskilling to ensure continued employment.<sup>18</sup> In conclusion, changes in workplace dynamics and demographics are driven by evolving demographics and shifting familial priorities. These changes necessitate workplaces to adjust their practices, policies, and cultures to support a diverse workforce and accommodate the needs of individuals and families. As seen in the evidence presented in this paper, multinational companies play a crucial role in embracing local communities and fostering inclusive environments. As we navigate the ever-changing landscape of work, it is essential for organizations to remain adaptable, responsive, and inclusive to thrive in this dynamic environment.

#### References

- [1] Asis, M. M. B., & Piper, N. (2008). Researching International Labor Migration in Asia. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 49(3), 423–444. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40220077>
- [2] Deanne K. Hilfinger Messias, Im, E.-O., Page, A., Regev, H., Spiers, J., Yoder, L., & Meleis, A. I. (1997). Defining and Redefining Work: Implications for Women's Health. *Gender and Society*, 11(3), 296–323. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/190404>
- [3] Goswami, U. (2007). *Internal Displacement, Migration, and Policy in Northeastern India*. East-West Center. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06479>
- [4] Janssens, M., & Steyaert, C. (2012). Towards an Ethical Research Agenda for International HRM: The Possibilities of a Plural Cosmopolitan Framework. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 111(1), 61–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41684057>
- [5] Martin, F. E. (2006). INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION. *Landscape Architecture*, 96(7), 56–65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44675621>
- [6] MAZUMDAR, I., NEETHA, N., & AGNIHOTRI, I. (2013). Migration and Gender in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(10), 54–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23391360>
- [7] Moghadam, V. M. (2005). Women's Economic Participation in the Middle East: What Difference Has the Neoliberal Policy Turn Made? *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1(1), 110–146. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40326851>
- [8] Norton, A. (2017). *Automation and inequality: The changing world of work in the global South*.

<sup>13</sup> See Thornton and Fricke (1987)

<sup>14</sup> Shivers-McNair, A., & San Diego, C. (2017). Localizing Communities, Goals, Communication, and Inclusion: A Collaborative Approach. *Technical Communication*, 64(2), 97–112. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26464440>

<sup>15</sup> Janssens, M., & Steyaert, C. (2012). Towards an Ethical Research Agenda for International HRM: The Possibilities of a Plural Cosmopolitan Framework. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 111(1), 61–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41684057>

<sup>16</sup> See Thornton and Fricke (1987)

<sup>17</sup> See Shivers-McNair and San Diego (2017)

<sup>18</sup> See Norton (2017)

International Institute for Environment and Development. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep02662>

- [9] Parida, J. (2011). GLOBALISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN - AN ASSESSMENT. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 72(2), 429–435. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42761428>
- [10] Shivers-McNair, A., & San Diego, C. (2017). Localizing Communities, Goals, Communication, and Inclusion: A Collaborative Approach. *Technical Communication*, 64(2), 97–112. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26464440>
- [11] Thornton, A., & Fricke, T. E. (1987). Social Change and the Family: Comparative Perspectives from the West, China, and South Asia. *Sociological Forum*, 2(4), 746–779. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/684301>