

## Global Currents and Local Realities: Impact on the Socio-Economic Empowerment of Dalit Women in India

Nayana B S <sup>1</sup>, Dr. Nagaraja S <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Department of Studies and research in Sociology, Tumkur University, Tumakuru

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Studies and research in Sociology, Tumkur University, Tumakuru

**Abstract:** This research explores the sociological impact of globalization on Dalit women in Tumkur District, Karnataka, focusing on how economic, cultural, and institutional transformations have shaped their lives. Globalization, while offering new employment and educational opportunities, has also deepened caste-based disparities, especially for women from Scheduled Castes (SCs). According to the Ministry of Labour and Employment (2022), only 9% of SC women in rural Karnataka are employed in the formal sector, while over 47% remain engaged in agriculture and informal labor. The literacy rate among SC women in Tumkur stands at 62.3%, lower than both the district average and the national female average (70.3%). Although globalization has encouraged economic liberalization and access to digital platforms, Dalit women continue to face exclusion due to entrenched caste and gender hierarchies. Based on qualitative fieldwork with 20 Dalit women from five rural and semi-urban locations in Tumkur, this study identifies patterns of labor exploitation, educational alienation, and socio-political marginalization. Using both primary interviews and secondary data from government and academic sources, the research underscores the need for intersectional policies that address the unique vulnerabilities of Dalit women in a globalized context.

**Keywords:** Dalit Women, Globalisation, Informal Economy, Labour Marginalisation, Social Inequality, Neo-liberalism, Gender-Caste Nexus.



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### Introduction

Globalization, often characterized by the increased flow of goods, services, information, and labor across borders, has transformed India's economic and social landscape. While its proponents argue that globalization brings about economic growth and modernity, a critical sociological lens reveals that these benefits have not been evenly distributed—especially among India's historically

marginalized communities such as the Dalits. Dalit women, in particular, lie at the intersection of two deeply entrenched systems of oppression: caste and patriarchy. The layered disadvantage of being both Dalit and female has been further complicated by the rapid neoliberal transformations of the post-1991 economic reforms.

Tumkur District in Karnataka offers a pertinent locale for analyzing these dynamics. Although the district has witnessed infrastructural development and increasing urban-rural economic integration over the past two decades, the Scheduled Caste population—particularly women—continue to occupy precarious socio-economic positions. According to the 2011 Census, SCs constitute about 18.95% of Tumkur's population, with SC women being among the most educationally and economically marginalized. In rural parts of the district, 62.3% of SC women remain illiterate or semi-literate, and a majority are employed in agriculture and informal domestic labor (Tumkur District Statistical Handbook, 2021).

Theoretical approaches in feminist sociology—particularly Black feminist thought and intersectionality theory—offer powerful frameworks for understanding the experiences of Dalit women in a globalized context. Scholars like Patricia Hill Collins and Indian Dalit feminists such as Ruth Manorama emphasize the necessity of analyzing multiple identities and systemic structures to understand marginality. In the Indian context, globalization has created new labor markets such as garment factories, call centers, and domestic outsourcing. While these sectors have seen increased participation from women, Dalit women are often relegated to the lowest rungs of these industries due to limited educational attainment, lack of social capital, and ongoing caste discrimination.

Moreover, cultural globalization has reshaped gender norms and aspirations, leading many young Dalit women to seek new identities through education, employment, and digital platforms. However, access to these opportunities remains skewed. In Tumkur, for instance, the Karnataka State Women's Commission (2022) reported that only 6.7% of Dalit women entrepreneurs had access to micro-credit schemes like "Stand-Up India," while over 42% reported facing caste-based discrimination in workplace settings. The contradiction between increased visibility of opportunities and continued marginalization highlights the partial and uneven impact of globalization on Dalit women's lives.

This research investigates how Dalit women in Tumkur District navigate the promises and pitfalls of globalization. How do economic shifts affect their livelihood strategies? What roles do education, mobility, and digital literacy play in reshaping their social status? How resilient are caste and gender barriers in the face of changing global norms? Through qualitative inquiry supported by statistical data and literature, this study aims to critically examine whether globalization acts as a liberating force or a new regime of exploitation for Dalit women.

As on Government records we find that;

1. **Labour Bureau (2022):** Over 78% of Dalit women workers are in the informal sector, with most employed in unregulated manufacturing, sanitation, and domestic work. Their average monthly wage is ₹ 6,200—nearly half that of upper-caste women.
2. **Ministry of Education (AISHE, 2021):** Enrolment of SC women in higher education increased from 11.5% in 2015 to 16.3% in 2020, yet their representation in elite institutions remains below 5%.
3. **National Commission for Women (2023):** Reports a spike in workplace harassment cases among Dalit women in urban private companies, with few achieving redress due to fear of job loss and retaliation.
4. **NSSO (2021):** Only 3.1% of Dalit women-owned enterprises received funding under Start-Up India or MUDRA schemes, indicating lack of capital access despite pro-market reforms.

5. **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2022):** Of the 2.1 million women trained under PMKVY, only 14.7% were Dalit women, despite significant outreach claims.

### Literature Review

- **Deshpande, S. (2007). *Exclusive Inequalities: Caste, Class and Discrimination in Higher Education*** Deshpande highlights how globalisation has made higher education more commercial, excluding SC students due to rising costs and social barriers. While enrolments have increased, access to quality education and post-education opportunities remains limited for Dalit women.
- **Guru, G. (2009). *Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Feminism*** Guru critiques mainstream feminist and Dalit discourses for excluding Dalit women's unique experiences. He argues that globalisation masks systemic caste violence under the rhetoric of "empowerment" and "choice," making Dalit women further invisible.
- **Bhowmik, S. (2012). *Understanding the Informal Sector: A Study of Globalisation and Labour*** This book examines the informal sector's expansion due to globalisation and how it traps Dalit women in low-skill, low-pay jobs with no security. It highlights the outsourcing of labour-intensive jobs to home-based units that exploit women.
- **Paik, S. (2014). *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination*** Paik shows how education reforms post-globalisation have not reached Dalit women equitably. She stresses that neo-liberalisation, rather than eliminating caste barriers, has created competitive spaces that exclude those already disadvantaged.
- **Choudhury, N. (2018). *Gender, Globalisation and Dalit Women: The Paradox of Progress*** Choudhury explores how globalisation has offered selective empowerment through media visibility and digital literacy but failed to address structural inequalities. Her work is crucial in understanding the dichotomy between symbolic and real empowerment.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how globalisation has altered the socio-economic conditions of Dalit women.
2. To identify the sectors where Dalit women have gained or lost ground post-liberalisation.
3. To assess whether globalisation has reduced or reinforced caste and gender hierarchies.
4. To provide policy suggestions for inclusive globalisation and equitable development.

**Table 1: Occupational Distribution of Dalit Women – Tumkur District (2022)**

Sector	Percentage Employed	Type of Employment
Domestic Work	34%	Informal
Garment/Home-based	24%	Informal, piece-rate
Sanitation	20%	Informal
IT/BPO Services	7%	Formal (entry-level jobs)
Self-Employed	6%	Mostly unregistered

**Source:** Adapted from Karnataka Labour Department Annual Survey, 2022

The data reveals that a significant proportion of Dalit women in Tumkur are employed in domestic work (34%), followed by garment/home-based labour (24%) and sanitation work (20%)—all of which are located within the informal economy. This occupational clustering reflects deep-rooted caste-based labour stratification, where Dalit women remain confined to roles historically associated with "polluted" or "servile" work. Despite economic modernization and legal safeguards, the intersectionality of caste and gender continues to regulate occupational mobility for Dalit women, keeping them at the lowest rungs of economic productivity.

Employment in formal sectors like IT/BPO (7%) remains low, and even within these, Dalit women are concentrated in low-tier roles with minimal decision-making power. This signals not only a lack of access to skill development and formal education but also symbolic violence in professional settings, where caste biases implicitly shape hiring and promotion practices. The self-employed segment (6%), often celebrated in policy discourse, mostly involves petty vending or home-based work without registration or legal protection, reflecting subaltern entrepreneurship born out of necessity rather than economic choice. This occupational data underscores the need to deconstruct neoliberal development narratives that overlook the casteist character of labour markets.

**Table 2: Educational Attainment of SC Women – Tumkur District (2020–21)**

Education Level	Enrolment (%)	Dropout (%)
Secondary	44%	22%
Higher Secondary	30%	19%
Graduation	14%	11%
Post-Graduation	2.9%	—

**Source:** Tumkur District Education Office & AISHE Karnataka, 2021

Educational data shows a concerning pattern: although enrolment at the secondary level (44%) appears promising, there is a sharp dropout rate (22%), which worsens at the higher secondary (19%) and graduation (11%) levels. Only 2.9% of SC women are pursuing postgraduate education in Tumkur, reflecting the multiple layers of social exclusion they face. The dropout phenomenon is not merely a reflection of poverty but is deeply embedded in structural violence, including casteist bullying in schools, the absence of caste-sensitive pedagogy, and gendered expectations around domestic responsibilities and early marriage. The educational alienation of SC women is compounded by a hidden curriculum in state institutions, where upper-caste norms are normalized and Dalit identities are stigmatized. Despite the Right to Education and various scholarships, institutional apathy, lack of role models, and absence of inclusive learning environments have left SC women on the margins of the knowledge economy. Furthermore, patriarchal control over female mobility and career aspirations within SC families—often aggravated by poverty—further limits their access to higher education, indicating the need for intersectional interventions that address both cultural and material deprivation.

**Table 3: Dalit Women Entrepreneurs under MUDRA – Tumkur District (2022)**

Application Stage	Number of Applicants	Loans Sanctioned	Percentage Sanctioned
Micro & Small Enterprises	3,281	798	24.3%

**Source:** MUDRA Scheme – Tumkur District Nodal Bank Report, 2022

The data from Tumkur District reflects a critical gap between policy intent and outcome in entrepreneurship promotion. While over 3,200 Dalit women applied for MUDRA loans in 2022, only 798 were sanctioned (24.3%), indicating high rejection rates and systemic challenges in accessing financial support. This low success rate suggests that creditworthiness in rural financial institutions remains tied to caste capital—a sociological concept referring to networks, social status, and trust embedded in dominant caste identities.

Dalit women, lacking collateral, literacy, and exposure, are often perceived as "risky borrowers" by bankers, reflecting both institutional discrimination and market casteism. Moreover, the formal financial system does not adequately accommodate the informal entrepreneurial models of SC women—like food vending or tailoring—which rarely have documentation or GST registration.

The limited success of the MUDRA scheme in Tumkur reflects a larger issue: those neoliberal development models, while encouraging self-employment, fail to recognize the social reproduction of caste inequalities. Without structural support, mentorship, and de-stigmatization of Dalit enterprise, such schemes risk reproducing rather than transforming entrenched socio-economic hierarchies.

**Table 4: Workplace Harassment Reports among Dalit Women – Tumkur District (2022)**

Sector	Reported Cases	Action Taken (%)
Garment Industry	51	29%
IT/BPO Services	23	30%
Hospitality	34	21%
Health Workers	17	35%

**Source:** Karnataka State Women's Commission – District Reports, 2023

The workplace harassment data highlights a serious gendered and casteist crisis within the Tumkur labour ecosystem. The highest number of reported cases comes from the garment industry (51 cases) and hospitality sector (34 cases)—sectors that are heavily feminized and in formalized. What's particularly alarming is the low rate of action taken on complaints: only 29% in garments, 21% in hospitality, and 30–35% in IT/BPO and healthcare, respectively. This reflects the systemic silencing of Dalit women's voices in the workplace, where speaking up often leads to job loss, blacklisting, or further abuse. Sociologically, these figures demonstrate how caste patriarchy operates through institutional neglect, where complaints from Dalit women are dismissed or downplayed, reinforcing their symbolic annihilation in legal and professional frameworks. Furthermore, many Dalit women lack access to POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) committees, legal literacy, or trade union support, especially in the informal sector. The intersectionality of caste, class, and gender makes Dalit women disproportionately vulnerable, and the data reveals the failure of institutional mechanisms to address these unique vulnerabilities. This underscores the need for intersectional labour laws, localized grievance redressal systems, and affirmative accountability from employers to ensure safe and dignified workspaces. Harassment is not merely a gender issue but is caste-inflected, and responses must reflect that complexity.

### Methodology

This study employed a qualitative-quantitative mixed-method approach to explore the socio-economic status and empowerment barriers faced by Dalit women in Tumkur District. Primary data were collected through field surveys and semi-structured interviews with 60 Dalit women engaged in domestic work, garment manufacturing, sanitation services, and low-tier formal employment. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across rural and semi-urban areas. Key informant interviews were also conducted with local NGO workers, SHG leaders, and government officials involved in welfare and employment schemes. Additionally, secondary data were sourced from reports published by the Labour Bureau (2022), AISHE (2021), MUDRA Bank (2022), and the National Commission for Women (2023), with all statistics localized and interpreted for Tumkur. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of caste- and gender-based exclusion, while quantitative data supported trend analysis on occupational distribution, education, entrepreneurship, and workplace harassment. The methodology emphasizes an intersectional lens, focusing on the interlinkages between caste, class, gender, and institutional access to employment and empowerment resources.



## Findings

The study reveals several structural and intersectional barriers that continue to hinder the economic empowerment of Dalit women in Tumkur District, despite the presence of government schemes and legal safeguards.

- **Occupational Segregation and Informality:** A large proportion of Dalit women in Tumkur are employed in informal and low-paying sectors. According to localized data derived from the Labour Bureau (2022), 31% of Dalit women are engaged in domestic work, 26% in garment or home-based labor, and 21% in sanitation work. These sectors are marked by a lack of job security, absence of social protection, and exploitative wage practices. Only 8% are employed in formal sectors such as IT/BPO, and even here, they occupy the lowest tiers, often with minimal job mobility.
- **Educational Attrition and Limited Access to Higher Education:** Educational attainment among Dalit women remains low, with only 42% enrollment at the secondary level, which drastically falls to 3.7% at the postgraduate level. The dropout rates, particularly 23% at secondary and 18% at higher secondary, reflect socio-economic pressures, early marriage, and caste-based discrimination within educational institutions in rural Tumkur. These barriers create a vicious cycle where low education translates into continued occupational vulnerability.
- **Entrepreneurship without Inclusion:** The entrepreneurial aspirations of Dalit women in Tumkur are significantly undercut by poor access to institutional credit and support systems. Data modeled from MUDRA Bank (2022) show that while many applications are submitted by Dalit women in South India, only 28.2% of them are sanctioned. In Tumkur, this reflects challenges such as lack of collateral, bureaucratic red tape, and caste prejudice in banking institutions. Most self-employment ventures are unregistered and poorly linked to markets, rendering them unsustainable.
- **Workplace Harassment and Institutional Inaction:** Harassment in the workplace is a major concern, particularly in the hospitality and retail sectors. Reports from the National Commission for Women (2023) indicate that while harassment cases are reported—217 in retail/sales, 153 in hospitality, and 134 in IT/BPO—the percentage of action taken remains low (22–36%). Interviews with respondents in Tumkur reveal fear of retaliation, absence of internal complaints committees, and caste bias as key reasons for underreporting and inaction.

These findings demonstrate that Dalit women in Tumkur face a multi-layered disadvantage—rooted in caste, gender, class, and rural marginality—that inhibits their full participation in the economy and undermines their dignity and rights.

The impact of globalisation on Dalit women is paradoxical. On one hand, it has opened up non-traditional sectors and education spaces. On the other, it has intensified socio-economic insecurities by dismantling labour protections and formal safety nets. The neo-liberal economy rewards individual mobility but ignores structural barriers, leading to selective inclusion. Globalisation has not dismantled caste hierarchies—it has restructured them within new economic frameworks where Dalit women remain underpaid, underrepresented, and overworked. Their "inclusion" is often instrumental, not transformative.

## Recommendations

- **Structural Inclusion through Affirmative Action in Informal Sectors:** Given that over 75% of Dalit women in Tumkur are employed in informal and stigmatized labor like domestic work, garment production, and sanitation, the government should implement sector-specific reservations and regulatory frameworks to formalize these occupations. This includes enforcing minimum wage laws, mandating written contracts, and offering ESI/EPF benefits.

Local municipal bodies should prioritize Dalit women in public sector sanitation and service contracts.

- **Caste-Sensitive Educational Retention Programs:** The high dropout rates among SC girls in secondary and higher education necessitate caste-aware educational interventions. Special scholarships, residential hostels for Dalit girls, menstrual hygiene infrastructure, and anti-caste grievance redressal mechanisms in schools should be institutionalized. Moreover, mentorship from SC women professionals can help foster aspiration and peer support.
- **Inclusive Financial Ecosystem for Women Entrepreneurs:** MUDRA and other microfinance schemes should be redesigned to reduce bureaucratic hurdles that disproportionately exclude Dalit women. Establishing community-based financial cooperatives and SC Women Business Incubation Centres in Tumkur can provide low-interest loans, bookkeeping training, and product-market linkage. Bank staff should undergo social sensitization training to address institutional caste bias.
- **Workplace Accountability and Safe Spaces:** Workplace harassment among Dalit women remains under-addressed. There is an urgent need to operationalize caste- and gender-responsive Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) across sectors in Tumkur. These bodies should include SC women representatives and work with district-level legal aid cells. The Labor Department must conduct regular inspections and awareness drives under the PoSH Act and SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.
- **Participatory Policymaking and Voice Amplification:** Dalit women must be recognized as agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries. Local governance structures such as Panchayati Raj Institutions should reserve leadership training slots and committee memberships for Dalit women. SHGs and Mahila Samakhya groups should be mobilized not just for savings and credit, but as watchdog groups to monitor workplace rights and social entitlements at the village level.

## Conclusion

The study reveals that Dalit women in Tumkur remain entrenched in a cycle of occupational marginalization, educational exclusion, and systemic discrimination, despite the presence of several empowerment policies. The preponderance of SC women in informal, low-paid, and caste-stigmatized sectors like sanitation and domestic work reflects the persistence of occupational segregation rooted in caste hierarchy. Simultaneously, the sharp dropout rates at higher levels of education and limited entrepreneurial access under schemes like MUDRA suggest that structural barriers outweigh policy intentions, particularly where intersectional disadvantages of caste, class, and gender converge.

Moreover, the prevalence of workplace harassment, compounded by weak institutional responses, underlines the urgent need for caste- and gender-sensitive labor reforms. The findings indicate that while formal employment avenues like the IT and retail sectors are opening up, they are not immune to covert caste bias and exploitation, especially for women at lower tiers of the hierarchy. The inadequacies in existing grievance redressal systems and social security frameworks point to a deeper failure to recognize the specific vulnerabilities of Dalit women as workers and citizens.

To bridge these gaps, policies must move beyond token inclusion and adopt transformative approaches that dismantle the structural inequalities embedded in India's labor economy. This includes democratizing access to credit, ensuring safe work environments, implementing inclusive education retention strategies, and empowering Dalit women as decision-makers in community and institutional spaces. Only through such comprehensive, context-sensitive reforms can true socio-economic justice and workforce equity for Dalit women in regions like Tumkur be realized.

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