

## New Arenas of Social Change: Media and Globalisation

### Introduction

The study of contemporary Indian society requires a deep understanding of the "new arenas" where social change is most visible and intense.

These arenas are primarily defined by the dual processes of globalisation and the revolution in mass media and communications.

While social change is an ongoing historical process, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have witnessed a shift in the scale and speed of these transformations, driven by technological advances and policy shifts like liberalisation.

These processes are not merely economic or technological; they are deeply sociological, affecting how we work, communicate, consume, and perceive our identities.

### I. Globalisation and Social Change

Globalisation refers to the growing interdependence between different people, regions, and countries as social and economic relationships stretch world-wide.

It is a complex series of economic, social, technological, cultural, and political changes that have increased the integration and interaction among people and companies in disparate locations.

#### 1. The Economic Dimension: Liberalisation and the Market

The primary engine of globalisation in India has been the policy of liberalisation initiated in 1991.

- **Policy Shift:** Liberalisation refers to a range of policy decisions taken by the Indian state to open up the economy to the world market, marking a break from earlier protected market policies.

- **Marketisation:** This involves the use of market-based solutions to solve social and economic problems.

- **Indian Industry:** Under liberalisation, private and foreign firms were encouraged to invest in sectors previously reserved for the government, such as telecom, civil aviation, and power. This led to many Indian companies being bought by multinationals (e.g., Coca-Cola buying Parle) or Indian companies becoming multinationals themselves.

- **Globalisation of Finance:** For the first time, due to the IT revolution, finance has been globalised, allowing billions of dollars to be traded within seconds across electronic circuits in 24-hour global markets.

### 2. The Knowledge Economy and New Labour Patterns

Globalisation has shifted the economic base from purely agricultural or industrial to what is termed the "weightless economy" or knowledge economy.

- **Weightless Economy:** This refers to products based on information, such as computer software, media, and internet services.

- **Knowledge Economy:** In this system, the workforce is involved in the design, development, technology, marketing, and servicing of products rather than physical production.

- **BPO and Outsourcing:** India has become a global hub for Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and software services, providing low-cost labour and services to the West.

- **New Occupations:** This era has given rise to previously unheard-of professions, such as event managers, and a class of upwardly mobile, high-salaried professionals in metropolitan cities.

### 3. Social and Livelihood Impacts

The impact of globalisation is far-reaching but uneven, creating new opportunities for some while causing loss of livelihood for others.

- **Livelihood Loss:** The entry of foreign goods has displaced traditional workers; for example, women silk spinners in Bihar lost jobs to Chinese and Korean silk yarn, and traditional weavers in Andhra Pradesh faced distress because they could not compete with power looms or adapt to changing tastes.
- **Resource Competition:** The entry of large foreign fishing vessels into Indian waters has deprived local fishing communities of their catch, affecting women fish sorters and vendors.
- **Agrarian Distress:** With the withdrawal of support prices and subsidies under WTO rules, Indian farmers are now exposed to intense global competition, often making it difficult to make a decent living from agriculture.

### 4. Globalisation and Culture

Globalisation affects culture in paradoxical ways, leading to debates about whether cultures are becoming more similar (homogenisation) or mixing in new ways (glocalisation).

- **Glocalisation:** This is a strategy used by multinational firms to mix global products with local traditions to enhance marketability. Examples include McDonald's selling vegetarian products in India and foreign TV channels like MTV using Indian languages.

- **Culture of Consumption:** Media and advertisements promote a culture where spending is encouraged and shopping is a primary pastime. This is evident in the spurt of shopping malls, multiplexes, and amusement parks in cities.

- **Corporate Culture:** This seeks to increase productivity by creating unique organisational rituals and traditions to enhance employee loyalty.

- **Indigenous Knowledge:** Globalisation has led to threats against indigenous knowledge systems, highlighted by attempts of multinational companies to patent traditional items like Tulsi, Haldi, and Basmati rice.



The advertisement features a student in a yellow shirt sitting at a desk, writing in a notebook. On the desk is a laptop displaying a bar chart, a calendar, and a desk lamp. The background is a vibrant blue and orange gradient with a large arrow pointing upwards. Text on the graphic includes 'Practice Daily. Improve Faster.', 'Mock Tests + Topic Practice.', and 'Visit [www.unidrill.in](http://www.unidrill.in)' with a hand cursor icon. The UniDrill logo is in the top right corner.

## II. Mass Media and Social Change

Mass media includes television, newspapers, films, magazines, radio, and advertisements that reach mass audiences. Like any social institution, its structure and content are shaped by economic, political, and socio-cultural contexts.

### 1. The Dialectical Relationship

There is a dialectical relationship between mass media and society: the media is influenced by the society in which it is located, but it also exerts a far-reaching influence back onto that society.

- **State vs. Market:** In the first decades after independence, the media was seen as a partner in national development, with the state playing a central role. In the post-1990 period of globalisation, the market has become the primary driver.

## 2. The Television Revolution

Television has undergone profound transformations since its inception in India.

- **Developmental Phase:** Early programming, such as the soap opera *Hum Log* (1984-85), intentionally used entertainment to educate viewers on social themes like gender equality and family size.
- **Satellite and Globalisation:** Since the 1990s, national markets have given way to fluid global markets. The number of channels has exploded, including 24/7 news channels, reality shows, and Bollywood-based entertainment.
- **Democratic Reach:** News has become more immediate and informal, fostering public debate and expanding its reach every year.

## 3. The Print Media and Language Growth

Contrary to some expectations, the print media has seen significant growth, particularly in the Indian language belt.

- **Language Dailies:** While English dailies have stagnated, Hindi and other Indian language dailies have grown substantially (reaching 425 million readers in 2019).
- **Technological Changes:** Newspaper production has become fully automated since

the late 1980s, using networking and specialised software to gather news faster and allow for more regional editions.

- **Infotainment:** To appeal to younger readers with segmented interests, newspapers have shifted toward infotainment—a combination of information and entertainment. Newspapers are now often treated as consumer products.

## 4. The Radio Boom

Radio has seen a resurgence through FM stations in the post-liberalisation era.

- **Entertainment Focus:** Unlike the state-run All India Radio (AIR), which focused on news and development, private FM channels are restricted from broadcasting political news and thus specialise in popular music to retain urban audiences.
- **Conglomeration:** Most popular FM channels are owned by large media conglomerates, such as the Times of India group or Star Network.

## 5. Global Communications and the Digital Divide

Advances in telecommunications technology have led to the compression of time and space, allowing instant global communication via the internet and satellite technology.

- **Digital India:** The government has initiated the "Digital India" programme to transform the country into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge economy.
- **The Digital Divide:** There remains a sharp difference in how easily different sections of people can access these new media. While many urban youth are constantly connected via cell phones, others in remote areas lack basic access.

- **Commodification:** This is the process where things not previously traded, like social skills or information, become commodities bought and sold in the market. The burgeoning of private coaching classes and marriage websites are examples of the commodification of education and marriage.

like the internet and fiber optics. This process underpins both the global economy and modern mass media.



### III. Interlinking the Arenas

The "new arenas" of change are not isolated; media and globalisation are deeply interlinked.

- **Media and Markets:** Globalisation is driven forward by information and communication technologies. The media acts as the primary vehicle for promoting the culture of consumption that sustains global markets.
- **Pushkar Fair Example:** The traditional cattle market at Pushkar has itself become a "product" for sale in the international tourist circuit, showing how traditions become commodities in a globalised world.
- **Digitalisation:** This is the process whereby information is produced as a universal binary code, allowing it to be processed and circulated at great speed across technologies