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Book Review: Appropriately Indian: Gender and Culture in a New Transnational Class

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Appropriately Indian: Gender and Culture in a New Transnational Class, 2012, Smitha Radhakrishnan, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan; 239 pages, Paperback (\$19.77)

Reviewed by Harasankar Adhikari¹

Information Technology has undoubtedly brought changes worldwide in all aspects of almost all societies, especially in human social and economic status and in cultural relations. The economic change and mobility of people are the prime drivers that reshape the world into a global context. Smitha Radhakrishnan has articulated various debates of these changes, especially in the status of Indian women in her book, *Appropriately Indian: Gender and Culture in a New Transnational Class*. She has given a lucid description about women's life in the IT industry. The author conducted her study on Indians -- both resident and nonresident in Bangalore and Mumbai of India and Santa Clara, California, and Silicon Valley. The ethnographic study has been analyzed in six chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. In the introduction under the heading "on background," she has defined the term "new transnational class" -- new emergent middle class as the result of the IT industry who have their own social and cultural tastes and how they practice "Indian Culture" outside the country considered as cultural streamlining. The notion of "Indianness" has been redefined. The chapter notes the changes among Indian women who as professionals enact, reinforce, and reinvent a new respectable femininity.

Chapter I observes that IT and knowledge professionals are considered as the new middle class according to their particular kind of work and lifestyle patterns. This knowledge has given a new shape to India towards its global recognition because it points toward knowledge economy, knowledge society, and development for knowledge. The professional women in IT industry are more actively alert for their identity as Indian. They have categorized their hierarchy in two tiers -- engineers, graphic designers, and technical writers are one category and the workers in business process outsourcing industry are the second category because of their work difference and their mobility -- both economic and geographic. The IT industry brings changes in women's status in both personal and public spheres. New women reinforce the values of nation to the global world.

In Chapter II, Radhakrishnan describes the role of IT professionals in casting India as global. The global work culture inherits a third culture, which is a mixture of two cultures (culture of India and outside India) into one process. It is promoted by IT corporates when they are providing training to Indians to adopt their mindset with changing global world beyond the traditional Indian culture. It emphasizes on the development of communication and empowerment. IT industry brings gender equity and it expresses women's independence from traditional roles. It is toward a global culture. Women consider IT industry as an empowering source because ethically they enjoy equal opportunity in their workplace.

Chapter III, examines the importance of IT professional women rather than women in government. and other jobs where they enjoy the benefit of reservation policies as a tactic of politicians to gain votes. The women IT professionals consider it as gender equitable because

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placement is by merit. IT has opened the global scope for their all-round development while women in government jobs work within limited scope. The social background is not a mark for IT professionals.

Chapter IV deals with the origin of individuality in the IT-based knowledge economy. In this industry, individuals are self-disciplined, educated, enterprising, and rational on the one hand, and creative, flexible, and autonomous in their professional and personal lives, on the other hand. The IT industry teaches independence and interdependence, self-actualization, and personal development. It is pursued to meet individual desires or freedom beyond the expectation of the family. It is true that IT industry has broken the traditional generational norms regardless of class, caste, and gender. The knowledge economy pushes them for a knowledge life and not just for earning money. They believe in and practice late marriage and selection of partners of their own choice. The married women are in stable marital life while the single women are independent and they keep contact with their family through their occasional visits.

Chapter V tells that the IT industry vividly breaks women's backward traditional role with an identity of high status. The respectable femininity cultivates a gendered "balance" in between workplace through cultural streamlining strategies as a multiplicity of potential meanings of Indianness. Obviously, the role of women in the family reproduces the "appropriate difference" in calculating the norms of "good families" as a normalcy of the Indian family. The study shows that the professional women in the IT industry are involved in high consumption in their personal lives when compared with the working women in government and other jobs. This materialism breaks the Indian family culture and it is enough to indulge bad habits and make them self-centered. They live in broken boundaries of Indianness. The professional women working outside India realize that there is emptiness in their modern changing life because of lack of familiarity, security, and emotional bonds of loving family. In this case, the family suffers from absence of values without sense of community and identity. They opine that the highly commodified life of their children is dangerous for their future. The worldwide exposure of IT professionals also promotes inappropriate behavior. Chapter VI examines the views of IT professionals on their religious identity which is decontextualized and depoliticized. The Indian IT professionals practice their religious norms even outside the country. The women in the IT industry follow religion as a routine activity and they orient their children with the rituals of Hinduism.

In conclusion, Radhakrishnan argues that India is now global due to the rapid growth in the IT industry. The professional women are accustomed with global life but their Indianness is upheld through Indian culture in their everyday life. The family life is more important than their working life and they ensure their Indianness through cultural streamlining. The study shows that the IT industry has helped in empowering women beyond their backward traditions. However, their Indianness is their unique identity even outside their country. The author explains the overall feel-good factors of Indianness and the women play a vital role in upholding Indian culture. This book is useful to intellectuals who are involved in assessing India's development after introduction of the IT industry. It is a useful resource for understanding the changing status of women in India.