CHAPTER IV

GLOBALIZATION'S IMPACT ON WOMEN WORK FORCE IN THAILAND

In the era of globalization, industrial development is a focal point, and this process is closely related to labour force, industry itself and government policy. Labour is an important component of bringing industrial development of the country in the process of globalization. An industrially developing country like Thailand, where majority of the industrial workers are women, it is an important aspect to study the role of women in the process of industrialization and globalization and their contribution in the national per capita income.

Scholars have pointed the starting point of Thailand’s industrial path from the late 1950s with the launching of First Six Year National Economic Development Plan (1951) which emphasized the strategy of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) and thus led to a steady progression from ISI to Export Oriented Industrialization. This process of industrialization and other macro-economic strategies adopted by the Thai government since the 1960s have been biased towards urban areas which is specifically focus on the city of Bangkok. Therefore, rural-agricultural sector has been given a low priority by the government.

Women’s status has been measured conventionally by such aggregate data as labour force participation, maternal and child health, literacy, employment, and the right to vote. Based on these indicators, in comparison with many other developing countries especially among ASEAN countries, Thai women appear to be comparatively better off by enjoying somewhat better health and education and holding second only to Singapore, the most prosperous nation in the region. In terms of economic participation, Thailand has the highest rate of women in the labour force, even higher than that of Japan. During 1970 to 1990, females aged 12-64 constituted 47 percent of the total work force, and this
rate has not declined in contrast to other ASEAN countries (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:97).

Table 12: Comparison of Women’s Condition in Health, Education and Employment among ASEAN Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Life Expectancy (year)</th>
<th>Anemia in pregnancy</th>
<th>Maternal Death (100,000 births)</th>
<th>Illiteracy Among Female (%)</th>
<th>Labour Force (LF) Participation (age 15+) as % of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>51.3</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<td>67</td>
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</table>


Since early Bangkok period, Thailand shifted from subsistence economy to market economy but its impact on women had not been felt until very recently during the last few decades. The major changes in terms of trade liberalization, globalization and market-oriented economic reforms were undertaken in the 1980s and were linked to the conditions under which the World Bank provided loans to Thailand (Phongpaichit 1995:147-148). Additionally, devaluations in the 1980s led to lowering the costs of local labour and attracted FDI to investment in the manufacturing and services of the country (Falkus 1995:27). This model of export-oriented ("neo-liberal") promoted by the World Bank, which dominated Thailand’s economic policy since the 1980s has intensified regional, class and gender biases in the society. It has biased the economy towards production for export markets, diminished the role of government, favoured unfettered capitalist development, privileged the urban area over the rural, and promoted tourism as a source of foreign exchange (Bell 1997:56). These whole processes of globalization have resulted in multinationals being able to exercise considerable influence on the local labour market. This export-led pattern of industrialization was also highly urban oriented,
with the highest concentration of industry in the Bangkok Metropolitan area which accentuated the tendency for rural-urban migration, a significant proportion of which were women (Kurian 1999:180-181). This dramatic process of urbanization is changing women’s sexual activities too. Although the majority (75 percent) of the population still lives in rural areas and depends on agriculture; driven by the need to survive, 7 million more people live illegally on encroached forest areas. Three million more women than men have moved out from villages in search of jobs, while one-fourth of rural households are headed by women (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:84). In all these examples of transformation, Thai women play a key role which is hardly acknowledged by anyone in the country.

“Economic Miracle” of Thailand (Bell 1997:55-56) has been fabricated largely on the backs of women. It is built on a foundation of capitalist patriarchy: a development model which employs the exploitation of women for rapid economic growth. The economic impact of this model on women has been exacerbated in the past decade or so by the adoption of neo-liberal, export-led growth strategies. The alleged economic success story is described by economists in terms of “the free market”, “exports”, “emerging markets”, “foreign investment”, “globalization”, and “development” which are fetishised representations of the sweat of Thai workers, especially Thai women. This model ensures that women, while producing much of the wealth, end up receiving little of what they produce. The fact that women are ignored in much of the academic research and discourse on Thailand, even among radicals, makes an analysis of their situation even more pressing. The impact of this model has been exposed by Thai women who have become the cutting edge of resistance to the struggle for an alternative, non-patriarchal, non-exploitative mode of development.

In the 1980s, the impact of FDI on women’s work in Thailand was remarkable and resulted in the greater feminization of the labour market and increased fragmentation of women’s work lives. Along with this, non-market labour segment continued to remain primarily women’s responsibilities. A special dimension of this process of fragmentation in Thailand was the relatively high degree of temporary migration undertaken by women.
Feminization of production and consumption has been a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for this pattern of growth and development. The feminization of production rests ultimately on the patriarchal subordination of women in factories, commercial sex work, and unpaid agricultural and household labour. This subordination has been exacerbated as a result of Thailand's adoption of "structural adjustment" programmes in the 1980s, with its emphasis on export-oriented growth and tourism as sources of foreign exchange for industrialization (Bell 1997:56-57). The feminization of consumption has meant the transformation of the lives of Thai women through the breakdown of the traditional family, the commodification of women through the growth of Madison Avenue style advertising images, and through patterns of consumption which affects women's lives as mothers, wives, and partners. Thai women have become objects of consumption through men's clubs, tourism and the international traffic in women.

Thai women are also highly visible in executive and professional positions in such modern sectors as finance, corporate business, market trading, university teaching and medicine, which often are considered male-dominated realms in the West. This visibility may sometimes reinforce outsiders' perceptions that Thai women enjoy a "high status", have attained equality with men, and are on the road to "success" along with the country's march towards the newly industrialized and growing economy (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:84). However, when we look into the other realms, the reality is quite contrary from the image projected by the country regarding women and their status.

The above statement is supported by the survey of 1964 which found that "working wives earn about 580 baht per month and their contribution represented 22 percent of their family's total income". In addition, the Thai women's work week is long, with an average of one free day per month (Ghosh 1990:17). Not only these, there are number of
women especially young women are working in various sectors with unequal treatment with male workers in various sectors.

The image of booming economy and visibility of Thai women particularly in the capital, Bangkok, cannot disguise the problems of a large proportion of poor (urban and rural) Thai women. Despite large amount of representation of women in economic activities and economic growth of the country, poverty prevails throughout the kingdom and also leads to the widening gap of income disparity among citizens along with the new and increasing problems of eroding natural environment and the spread of AIDS (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:85).

A great deal of attention in the gender and development issues has been addressed in the country with “New International Division of Labour (NIDL)”, where “low skill, low paying jobs are being relocated to the developing countries to be performed predominantly by women, while high skill, high paying jobs continue to remain in the developed countries where they are performed primarily by men”. Thailand offers no exception to the general global pattern of industrial development being sustained by a predominantly female labour force. For example in the electrical machinery and part sector, women constitute approximately 80 percent of the labour force (Thomson 1998:53). In Thailand there is a long tradition of women engaging in paid work; Suvanee (1977) stated that the proportion of female labour in Thailand was the highest in Asia and one of the highest in the world (Theobald 1997:189). In terms of working hours women are putting in as many as 55 hours per week. In the rural areas, the percentage of women working is 72.6 percent and is close to that of the males which is 80.3 percent. Since 1978, the labour force participation rate of women of every age group has shown an increasing trend while that for the men it is stable (Ghosh 1990:180). Therefore, Thai women are considered as the product of the contemporary process of economic growth and the historical development of changing gender relations in Thailand.

Export-Oriented Growth (Globalization) in Thailand

The main features of a neo-liberal, export-oriented growth model are:
(i) export-oriented industrialization which requires cheap unskilled labour for electronic assembly, textiles, clothing etc. to compete in a highly competitive world market;

(ii) balance of payments deficits resulting from the importation of the raw materials and capital goods required for industrialization;

(iii) the use of tourism as an important source of foreign exchange, a large component of which is the sexual services industry;

(iv) the continued migration from the countryside in response to growing rural poverty and inequality, the growth of capital-labour relations in agriculture, land speculation, and relative lack of development; this has led to migration into the urban areas especially from the North and Northeast regions of the country;

(v) the growth of a middle class, of western consumerism and with it a strengthening of bourgeois family relations leading to changes in the organization of household production;

(vi) westernized conceptions of beauty have tended to commodify women and turn them into sex objects, and objects for the gratification of Thai and western males (Bell 1997:63).

The Thai economy enjoyed a double digit growth rate during the period of booming economy. In 1989 and 1990, the rates were 12.3 and 11.5 percent respectively and Thailand was the fastest growing economy in Asia. The period of economic boom between 1988 and 1992, thus, came about with the process of internationalization of the Thai economy (Charoenloet 2005:122). With this process, Thailand has given larger importance to export secondary products such as textiles, garments, processed foods and polished gems. This urban-biased and cash-oriented economic development has been a mixed blessing of Thai women because from the very beginning of the development process, planners have largely ignored the issues of equality in order to boost economic growth (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:91-92). The Thai economy is undergoing a structural transformation from agriculture to industrial based economy, thus affecting women’s participation at all levels.
In order to bring this structural transformation, some firms have adopted cost-cutting strategies such as the casualisation of labour, hiring more temporary workers, externalization of cost or outsourcing as a way of reducing labour cost with the international competition from low cost countries. This leads to widespread contracting out and subcontracting, the informalisation of labour-relation with work divided into the categories of formal and informal, protected and unprotected labour. This is why cheap labour is being produced and reproduced in Thailand. And most of the victims of these casualisation and informalization of labour are women as they are easily available and less demanding (Charoenloet 2005:124). In this process of bringing informalization, firms tried to achieve greater flexibility and minimize the fixed cost portion of labour which have finally led to reduce the number of permanent workers, especially those with low skill levels and retained only well-trained, multi-skilled workers on a permanent basis (Liemt 1992).

Almost every company generally prefers subcontract workers, who are mostly women as these workers fall outside the labour protection law and have no access to social security and welfare system and are denied to form trade union in the factory (Charoenloet 2005:128). Even if there is a trade union, women are not as organized in trade unions as men, and enjoy less bargaining power than their male counterparts. Lack of access to credit and further training in modern technology are obstacles to women’s advancement in work. Women in the formal labour force enjoy very little or no social security benefits that are available to permanent workers. Women are appointed as casual labour or on daily wages in jobs such as assembling and soldering, which are commissioned to small groups of workers by big companies (Bannerji 2004:96).

On the other hand, the technological upgrading of Thailand’s (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5) industries which aims to improve quality, add value, and access new markets results to reduce demand for low skilled young women migrant workers from poor provinces. As families in such provinces have become dependent on remittances, those already at the greatest disadvantage in Thailand’s economy will suffer severe hardship as a result of these inevitable trends.
In the process of informalization and feminization of labour force, one step commonly adopted by the finns is, once children are old and skilled enough, the company encourages them to open small shop-houses in the vicinity. The shop-houses are simply labour recruiters or suppliers to the contracting finns. This disguised employment of labour has been very popular among exporting finns, as it permits them to recruit cheap labour without being seen as a direct employer (Charoenloet 2005:129).

Therefore, by looking at the situation of women and their role in national income of Thailand which has not been recognized due to its social structure, Kirsch (1984, cited in Theobald 1997:189-90) claims that Buddhist philosophy entails a sexual division of labour whereby men participate more in merit making religious and political activities as a result of women’s religious disadvantage: leaving women to predominate in the economic and entrepreneurial aspects of life. Thus the contemporary pattern of women workers constituting nearly half of the paid workforce has deep roots. However, the relatively new focus of EOI in Northern Thailand constitutes a watershed in the conditions, opportunities and constraints for women’s paid work. Cultural prescriptions regarding female employment interact with employers’ demands and state/ government policies in developing and selling women’s labour.

**Legal Framework of Thailand Government**

Due to the constraints and opportunities that the law sets on women’s social and economic participation, the Thai legal framework is directly relevant to any study of the employment of Thai women. The general standard for assessing laws and regulations (UNESCAP 1987:22) affecting women can be seen in the 1976 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which emphasizes the principle of equality of men and women before law. Another legal standard is the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) 1975 Declaration on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Women Workers. However, it has been noted that Thai labour laws for both men and women workers give very minimal protection when measured against these two United Nations’ standards.
Thai Labour Law

In Thailand issues on Labour (Charoenloet 1997:222) falls under the mandate of a number of ministries i.e. General labour policy comes under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Labour issues are also addressed, though less directly, by the Ministry of Interior on the formation process and some trade union activities, by the Ministry of Health on the workers’ health, by the Ministry of Industry on workers’ safety, by the Ministry of Education and University Bureau on a national plan for education, and by the Ministry of Commerce on consumer prices and import-export investment and so on.

The first comprehensive legislation covering both labour protection and labour relations was the Labour Relations Act 1956 (Wright 2004:202-203). Besides this, many other laws on labour have been passed by the government of Thailand i.e. Industrial Disputes Settlement Act 1956, The Announcement on Labour Relations 1972, Labour Relations Act 1975, Labour Protection Act 1998. Some of the labour laws which concentrate on the contractual relationship between employers (naijing) and employees (lukjang) are:

1) 1975 Labour Relations Act, (LRA) legislation which governs labour relations in the private non-agricultural sector.
2) 1990 Social Security Act Number, (SSA) legislation which established a limited social security system funded through contributions by government, employers and employees.
3) 1994 Workplace Compensation Act (WCA) which governs the compensation payable to employees, who become ill, disabled or die as a result of workplace accidents.
4) 1998 Labour Protection Act (LPA) which covers working hours, the employment of women and children, holiday and overtime payments and workplace health and safety.
5) 2000 State Enterprises Labour Relations Act (SELRA) which covered labour relations in state enterprises and allowed for the establishment of trade unions in state enterprises (Andrew et al. 2002:8)
However, 1975 LRA does not provide coverage for all public servants, nor does it cover those employed in state enterprises as defined by the 2000 SELRA and also those enterprises employing less than ten and those engaged in agricultural labour (most of them are women as men have left home to city in search of job and drag them by the influence of globalization). 1990 SSA do not apply to those employees who are employed on a temporary, casual or seasonal basis. As can be seen, the exclusions are extensive, and like the 1975 LRA, effectively exclude about half of all employed persons. 1994 WCA does not cover teachers employed in private schools. 1998 LPA does not cover those engaged in agricultural work and those engaged in work performed at home. In addition to the above Acts, the government have at various times introduced legislation that has stipulated and employees employed in various agencies be excluded from coverage of labour and social security legislation like section 38 of the Public Organization Act (Ibid:9-10).


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<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>71.23</td>
<td>70.79</td>
<td>64.47</td>
<td>57.81</td>
<td>60.29</td>
<td>51.89</td>
<td>44.99</td>
<td>40.97</td>
<td>40.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province*</td>
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<td>43.21</td>
<td>67.06</td>
<td>62.43</td>
<td>58.61</td>
<td>43.03</td>
<td>41.69</td>
<td>36.44</td>
<td>39.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>63.82</td>
<td>64.61</td>
<td>62.52</td>
<td>55.13</td>
<td>39.58</td>
<td>30.56</td>
<td>29.45</td>
<td>31.31</td>
<td>37.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>75.39</td>
<td>73.43</td>
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<td>47.94</td>
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<td>35.85</td>
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<td>North-East</td>
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<td>81.62</td>
<td>78.67</td>
<td>69.11</td>
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<td>47.55</td>
<td>43.27</td>
<td>39.03</td>
<td>40.93</td>
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*Province here refers to the five provinces surrounding Bangkok (Nakhon, Pathom, Nonthanburi, Pathumthani, Samutprakan and Samutsakhon)

Source: Labour Studies and Planning Division, Department of Labour Protection and Welfare.

From the above table it is suggested that the situation of women (and children) has improved as the rate of breaching legal provisions has decreased. However, even in 2000, the percentage of firms still breaching the laws remains unacceptably high.
Over many years, the official enforcement of minimum wages has been lax. Fines for not respecting minimum wages are small. It is estimated that some 40 percent of registered factories do not respect minimum wage legislation (Charoenloet 1997:13). Minimum wage rates only apply to full-time permanent employees. This clearly indicates that minimum wage legislation does not cover the women employees because labour forces who are engaged on temporary basis are mostly women. Most of the labours who are working in the export oriented firms were under subcontract and they are not covered by minimum wage legislation. Therefore, Thai women labour force are neglected by the government legislation and discriminated in various departments.

**Thailand Labour Law and Women**

Government of Thailand launched many programmes and plans in order to protect women workers. However, Thailand’s labor laws do not specify equal opportunity in employment. Thailand acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and withdrew its reservation about Article 11, which specifies that "States’ parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights". Thailand has also ratified the 1975 International Labour Organization’s Convention on Equality of Opportunity for Women Workers.

The only gender-specific provision in law was enacted in May 1993, and provides that: in addition to the 30 days sick leave available by law to all employees, pregnant women workers can ask for 90 days maternity leave with pay at the current wage. The costs are to be shared between employers and the social security fund. Women workers may also ask for 60 more days leave without pay if they have been employed for more than 180 days. These maternity provisions discourage the employment of married women, since employers wish to avoid the costs of maternity leave (Phamaniramai and Tonguthai 1994).
Thai labour law concerning women have been codified, but they are found in three main pieces of legislation: the 1929 Law Concerning Hire of Services Contract, which is Section 582 of the Civil and Commercial Code of Thailand; the 1972 Notification of the Ministry of Interior Re: Labour Protection; and the Labour Relations Act of 1975. (UNESCAP 1987:22)

The Hire of Services Contract Law (1929) gives no employment security to either male or female workers. It also does not require the employer from terminating a women's employment because of maternal status, pregnancy, maternity leave or family responsibilities. The Notification on Labour Protection (1972) does nothing to improve job security like giving severance pay. If an employee is dismissed for misconduct, both the 1929 Hire of Services Contract Law and the Notification on Labour Protection allow immediate termination without severance pay. The Labour Relations Act of 1975 gives certain further protection to Thai workers. In general, the legal framework providing rights and protection to workers is not as beneficial to Thai women workers as might be wished. Certain parts are clearly out of date. Furthermore, the parts which apply to all workers as well as those designed to protect women workers in particular are not enforced as well as might be desired owing to lack of funds, lack of personnel and inefficiency. Lack of education may mean workers, especially women, are unaware of their rights and legal protection as workers. Thus, employers find it easy to ignore or violate the labour laws. The result is inequality of opportunities for women workers. (Ibid: 23-24)

Under the terms of the 1998 LPA, employers are not permitted to discriminate between men and women employees with respect to:

1) Employment: Men and women must be treated equally except in those cases where the nature or conditions of work precludes such treatment
2) Wages: For work that is both qualitatively and quantitatively equal, employers are obliged to pay wages, overtime and holidays at the same rate regardless of the sex of the employee.
3) Sexual harassment: An employer or a foreperson, supervisor or inspector is prohibited from sexually harassing female or child employees (Andrew et al. 2002: 13-14).

There are special provisions in Thai Labour laws on special working conditions for women, children, the disabled and foreign workers. Employers are prevented from employing women to perform the following kinds of work:

a) mining or construction work
b) work at height
c) flammable materials
d) other types of work, may be specified by ministerial regulation

Pregnant women are specifically covered in the laws. Employers are not permitted to employ pregnant women between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Nor the pregnant women permitted to work overtime, on days off or in:

a) machinery related work or work that involves the use of vibrating machinery;
b) work associated with driving or transportation;
c) work that involves lifting, carrying or moving items that weight more than 15 kilograms; and
d) work on boats.

An employer is not permitted to dismiss a female employee who falls pregnant. The law also specifies that, if a medical certificate confirms that a pregnant employee is unable to perform her normal duties, she is entitled to ask for a temporary transfer to a task that is more appropriate to her physical condition, either before or after giving birth. However, the decision about the transfer rests with the employer. Where there is no contract or when the duration of employment is not specified, either the employer or the worker can terminate the employment after giving prior notice, which takes effect at the next payment. Since a large proportion of unskilled women workers are paid on a fortnightly, weekly, or even daily basis, the law allows employers to pay and then dismiss the worker. Employers are not required to show reasonable grounds for terminating employment, and
are not prohibited from terminating employment of women workers on grounds of marital status or pregnancy (ADB, Women, Politics, and Law 2009: 4/10). Thus, the labour laws related to women are not considered seriously by employers and then pushed women workers into trouble most of the time.

Since 1972, Minimum wage legislation has been in force in Thailand. However, it is generally for the full-time permanent males possessed with higher skills; not for younger unskilled males and females who are employed in foreign invested firms, large enterprises and smaller firms that tend to pay below legal minimum rates. Studies have shown that despite these provisions, discrimination against women, particularly the older and less skilled, is pervasive and women generally receive wages that average 20 percent lower than those for men, have less opportunity for career advancement, and are often the subject of sexual harassment at the workplace (Andrew et al. 2002:13-14).

Under the terms of the 1998 LPA, a normal working day is not to exceed 8 hours and a normal working week is not exceeding 48 hours. The exceptions to this include work that can be considered dangerous to the health and safety of employees. In this case, a normal working day is not to exceed 7 hours and a normal working week is not to exceed 42 hours (Ibid:15). In this case, we can remember about those women workers who are working in the export firms which produce dangerous chemicals, facing problems like discrimination on various grounds, health problem, unhealthy accommodation, overtime etc. Above all, to protect women from moral danger, female employees cannot work between midnight and 6:00 a.m., but shift workers are exempted. It is forbidden to employ unmarried females under 18 years of age in nightclubs, dance halls, dancing schools, bars, massage parlors, or hotels. These regulations are systematically flouted in Thailand's sex industry. Here we can put up a question that is, whether the government of Thailand are treating men and women equally on every ground? Where are the laws to protect the people of the nation?

Although the Labour Protection Law specifies that male and female workers must be paid equal wages, overtime, and holiday pay for work of the same nature, quality, and quantity
but it is quite a difficult task for women to challenge the existing practice of paying low wages to women for the same work with men. Furthermore, they also have this in their mind that if the law was challenged on these grounds, it might have an adverse affect on employment opportunities for them, especially in unskilled and semi-skilled categories because generally employers justify the lower wage rates for women on the grounds that women’s productivity is lower than men’s, yet many industries express a preference for female labor because women have a greater natural aptitude for work that requires manual dexterity.

Work Force/ Labour Force and Women

Economy is the key issue for Thai women that have become dependent on world trade and investment conditions. (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5) However, in the labour market, gender bias continues to perpetuate the existence of segmented labour market where inequality in wages, promotion and condition of work is pervasive.

The labour force in the urban economic sector of developing countries is mainly composed of female workers who have migrated to large metropolitan areas either temporarily or permanently. Thailand, as a case in point, is no exception to this demographic phenomenon, since many female rural workers have taken this option and become employed in various types of economic activities. The industrial sector has become the most popular, within the last two decades, with young female labourers. They enjoy factory work in the Bangkok Metropolis more than they do domestic work or participation in the service sector. Still, differences exist in terms of the skills and labour entry possibilities among those who were successful in job-seeking (Charoenloet and Soonthorndhada 1988:227).

The extent of a population’s contribution to its country’s economic well-being is generally summarized by the labour force participation rate, although labour supply is also determined by factors such as hours of work, skill level and intensity of work. Female labour force participation rates in Thailand have always been high and stable at 66 percent since 1971 (Tonguthai 1987:191-193). In the earlier phase of Thailand’s
planned development, the participation of women in the economy was very high but the
figure over the last few decades shows that the growth of the Thai female labour force
lagged behind the male labour force.

**Figure 5: Labor force participation rates, August 1986-1998**

The labor force participation rate is the percentage of the persons in the labor force to
total population 13 years and over.

According to official labour force statistics (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5),
employment status has been classified into five categories: employer, government
employee, private employee, unpaid family worker, and self-employed worker. Out of
these five categories, women exceed men only in the category of unpaid family worker,
which disguises the economic contribution of women to household enterprises such as
farming, fishing, trading and handicrafts.

It is stated that (Andrew et al. 2002:4) Thailand’s legal system revolves around a
hierarchy of codified laws. It is argued by the scholars that this hierarchical structure of
laws has disadvantaged labour. In 2000, of a total population of about 62 million, the
labour force in Thailand was officially estimated to involve just more than 33 million.
As far as women labour force is concerned, women have made a substantial contribution to Thailand’s economic development. Out of the 31.3 million persons in the labour force in 1995, 13.8 million or 44 percent were women, with 80 percent (11.1 million) working in rural areas and 20 percent (2.7 million) in urban areas. Agriculture absorbed 40 percent, manufacturing 19 percent, commerce 18 percent, and service 16 percent. Labour force participation rates in the 13-14, 15-19 and 20-24 age groups are significantly higher for women. Female production workers comprise between 70 and 90 percent of the labour force in Thailand’s export industries (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5).

The difference in labour force participation between men and women is highest among older groups in urban areas, where women 50-59 years of age are less than half as likely to be employed as men. Most manufacturing firms require women to retire at 55 years, and many industries, such as those producing electronic components, have recently reduced the female retirement age to 45 (Ibid.,). Therefore, it is said that Thai women have played a major role in the economic life of the country throughout history from the Ayudhaya and early Bangkok periods as they were capable of managing farms without their husbands and older sons of the family.

About 40 percent of the total work forces in the industrial sector are women. A series of problem relate to them, the following in particular:

a) a low level of education
b) low wages and discriminatory practices concerning wages
c) fewer opportunities for promotion than for men
d) health problems from working in factories
e) too brisk a transition from agricultural work to the industrial sector with no adequate preparation in knowledge and skills appropriate to the employment situation
f) lack of job security
g) weak trade unionism and organization on the part of women
h) men have more opportunities than women to use machinery
i) men tend to have permanent jobs while employment of women is piecemeal by nature
j) women work more hours than men due to the combined work load of agricultural and household work
k) women have insufficient income
l) women’s income is inconsistent
m) women have fewer opportunities to take up employment, especially after the rice farming season
n) women have fewer opportunities for training and participation (Ghosh 1990:194).

In the recent industrialization of Thailand women have occupied a key place in the manufacture of textiles, computer parts, jewellery, electrical and electronics equipment. However, women have a long history of problems associated with low wages, poor health and safety and difficulties in forcing employers to abide by legal provisions on maternity leave and other basic labour rights (Andrew et al. 2002:19). Therefore, it was suggested that women workers of Thailand should join in large number in trade union as that they can raise their voice for their rights. It is true that women workers of Thai could have achieved just as their counterparts (males), if their participation in the trade union is large.

**Trade Union**

The issues related to trade union have been considered seriously throughout their long history, as trade unions have maintained a precarious relation with various governments of Thailand. For long periods, trade unions have not remained industrially weak and politically marginalized. Since the onset of the 1997 crisis, the position of trade unions and their capacity to effectively represent workers in dealing with employers and governments have been further weakened. Regarding private sector employees, the 1975 crisis provides for the establishment of four types and levels of private-sector labour organizations:

a) Employee Committee
b) Trade Union
c) Labour Federation and
d) Labour Council

If we look at the representation of women in the trade unions, the percentage is very low in important positions compared to men. Of the union surveyed, 37.3 percent of members were male, 34.5 percent female with the remainder not specified. Men dominated union committees. A total of 79.3 percent of union presidents were men and 68.5 percent had men as union secretaries. The post of vice-presidents continued this dominance, with 72.2% being men (Andrew et al. 2002: 23-24).

Fewer than 10 percent of workers belong to unions, and women are less likely to be unionized than men, although a cross-industry Women’s Unity Group has been formed to represent women’s labour issues (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5). But most of the members of the union, federation and council are male members. Therefore, issues of the women welfare and security have always been neglected by the union. Women face two kinds of problem. First, private employers has already neglected the demands and issues of union and second, inside the union itself due to lack of number of women, issues of women has been neglected and ignored.

The emergence of privatization has further diminished the role of the trade unions. Privatization as a major public policy has been endorsed with a thought that by changing the nature of ownership, from public to private, the efficiency of the enterprise will be greatly enhanced. On 19 April 1991, the state enterprise trade unions were effectively abolished, in that they were allowed to function as associations but without any trade union rights. The abolition of state-enterprise unions, therefore, substantially weakened the bargaining power of the organized workers’ movement (Charoenloet 1997: 208).

Furthermore, Government of Thailand (Ibid:221) treated the worker’s movement as a core pressure group to stir up political instability, while the trade unions’ actual objectives are to seek and protect fairness, basic human rights and the rights of
association. Until today the government has employed a ‘divide and rule’ approach, which has been the main obstacle to trade union unity and development.

Globalization and Thai Women

Over the past few decades, the process of industrialization of the Thai economy coupled with the globalization of the international labour market has resulted in large numbers of Thai women migrating from their homes to other centres for employment especially in Bangkok metropolitan area as the opportunities in the service and industrial sectors expanded. Women were the preferred employees for the new jobs such as clothing and shoe manufacturing, the sorting of transistors, the assembly of pocket calculators and the handling of microchips for computer components. Currently, female migrant-workers are placed in extremely vulnerable positions as they venture forth into jobs away from their family and community support (Edwards and Roces 2000:257-258).

With this process of globalization under way and the programmes of economic liberalization which are being adopted by many countries, capital is becoming increasingly mobile across national borders. In this whole process and idea of benefit/flow of capital, its negative impact on women who are the major victim of globalization has almost been forgotten.

The last few decades of economic growth in Thailand have given rise to substantial general improvements in the economic status of Thai women. However, young women from the poorest regions have borne a disproportionate share of the costs of development. In the highest foreign exchange-earning sectors, export manufacturing and tourism, young women constitute 80-90 percent of the labour force, with the majority in the industry working for less than the minimum wage. Medium and small enterprises, which employ about two-thirds of women workers, typically pay women about 60 percent of the minimum wage. Women predominate in the lowest income group (less than B 750) in the manufacturing and service sectors. Women are a minority in the upper income group (over B 5,000), particularly in manufacturing and agricultural industries (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5).
The income gap between men and women which is commonly explained in terms of different skill levels cannot be empirically demonstrated, except in a few jobs that require superior physical strength. As in case of Thailand, unskilled young women seek work with low personal expectations and the short-term goal of earning money to remit to their parents, and therefore, tend to accept what they are offered, and many smaller manufacturing industries are only able to remain profitable and competitive by exploitation low-wage female labour.

Thai women contribute to vast amounts of the economic growth of the country, much of it unwaged. They represent 45 percent of the active labour force and 68 percent of all women (over 15) are economically active. Women’s role in production incorporates the sexual division of labour and reflects their role in reproduction. Young women are recruited from the countryside into factory work as “indentured servants”, their parents having sold their services to recruiters in exchange for a cash sum. Studies have shown that women are preferred in factories as they are more easily subjected to patriarchal control, are often less likely to organize and can be paid lower wages. Women have contributed to the Thai economic miracle in several important areas: industrial production (producing high value added in the export manufactures), “homework” (in the informal economy), agricultural labour (through unpaid work in the fields), unwaged housework, and subsistence production. They have also served as the human bait for more than $7 billion tourist industry (through the sexual services industry). Thai women have, in many of these ways, helped offset the country’s balance of payments deficits (Bell 1997:64-65). However, the conditions of Thai women workers, especially unskilled women, are still vulnerable and generally ignored by major bodies. This has also been demonstrated by the economic downturn since 1997 when they remain the most disposable workers who are often the first laid-off and few have access to severance or redundancy payments. Along with these, weak social system of Thailand is unable to provide support for these women and their family. The clear point is that employment for women in Thailand remains concentrated in the unskilled or semi-skilled sectors and also in the informal agricultural sectors (Edwards and Roces 2000:258). Even on the international arena too, since the 1970s Thailand has exported large number of unskilled
or semi-skilled workers to a large extent. Most of these workers come from the poverty stricken North-eastern region of Thailand. Thai women in the overseas sex industry face considerable hardship and racism abounds.

Electronic, textile and garment manufacturing sector has always been predominated by women in Thailand, but these were insignificant even in the 1950s. The manufacturing sector as a whole had twice as many men as women (Broadbent and Morris-Suzuki 2002: 161-73). Particularly in manufacturing sector, Thai women have taken occupations as craftsmen, production workers and labourers, as the economy has been restructuring away from agriculture and into industry (UNESCAP 1987:27).

The sectors in which women are majorly affected by the process of globalization are categorized broadly as:

1) Agriculture
2) Commercial Sex Industry
3) Homework/ Informal Sector
4) Industry/ Manufacturing Sector

However, this study will especially focus on manufacturing sector where we find the majority of women being affected most by the whole process of globalization.

1) Thai women in Agriculture

In terms of absorption of female labour, agricultural sector is the best and most significant sector in Thailand. It is estimated that about 25 percent of manufacturing activities is on the basis of agricultural industries. Thailand is famous as the world’s largest producer of rice, tapioca, and rubber, and a leading producer of sugar, shrimp, and canned fish – all female labour-intensive industries.

However, the emphasis on export crops has displaced women workers from permanent agricultural employment into seasonal employment (Globalization, gender relations and the situation of women 2008: 6/10). Therefore, declining opportunities for labour in the
agricultural sector was accompanied by the promotion of export-led growth in Thailand. There were three processes that directly contributed to declining employment opportunities in the agricultural sector i.e. growing scarcity of land; impact of trade policy and export prices on incomes in agriculture; and the limited potential for employment through rural industrialization.

The demand for agricultural labour is less than the supply; migration to the cities is a common response to rural unemployment. Rapid economic growth has brought with it increased inequality both between and within rural and urban areas; the growth of a middle class on the one hand who can aspire to western standards of living and the growth of urban and rural poverty on the other. Agriculture, whether traditional or capitalistic, has long been characterized by a sexual division of labour. Thai women have always worked in the fields. Yet 7 out of 10 women agricultural workers are classified by the government as “unpaid family workers”; only 1 in 7 receives payments for their services. Roughly 70 percent of their labour is unrewarded (Bell 1997:67).

In 1971, the rural labour force participation rate for women was about 32 percent above that of urban women. The changing nature of rural women’s work, however, had reduced this difference to 16 percent by 1955. Women’s employment in agriculture has declined relative to that of men since 1971, reflecting industrialization over the past three decades and the impact of female rural-to-urban migration.

Table 14: Agricultural Workers by Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>6,745,820</td>
<td>6,302,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>9,055,200</td>
<td>8,352,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>8,196,700</td>
<td>6,097,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>6,982,700</td>
<td>4,657,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding women's labour force in agriculture is concerned, number of women engaged in agricultural sector has been reduced since last few decades i.e. eighty-two percent of women were engaged in agriculture in 1971, but the rate had dropped to only 40 percent by 1995. Among rural women, labour force participation rates are highest (approximately 80 percent) in the older age groups of 30-34, 35-39, and 40-49 (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5).

The development model has led to the out-migration from the poorest rural areas in response to poor living conditions, and the absorption of small subsistence farms into larger units. This has led to an “unlimited supply of labour” into the cities: a pool of cheap labour at low wages to work as domestic servants, in factories, the service economy and the sexual services industry (Bell 1997:67).

It is also noted that pesticides and insecticides are routinely used without attention to safety precautions and, as the main component of the agricultural labour force, women are particularly vulnerable (Edwards and Roces 2000:257).

Besides that, some of the richest agricultural districts of the province of Thailand have been used to produce potatoes for the Lay's Potato Chip Company (Khuankaew and Norsworthy 2005:2). Traditionally, Thai people do not eat potatoes. Through the use of powerful media campaigns Lay's potato chips have been promoted as the "snack" of choice for children in Thailand. Now, children are eating these potato chips instead of traditional healthy snacks like rice cakes, and health issues such as obesity and diabetes are on the rise. We can see how the corporation has used the strategies of globalization. Local natural resources, such as land, water, and inexpensive labour, have been brought up for the purpose of growing a crop that Thai people do not traditionally eat. The farmers, who previously grew rice for themselves and their neighbours, now grow these cash crops for a large corporation; chemicals are introduced and intensely used to increase the standard of production. Then, the corporation uses the media to create a need that did not previously exist - potato chips - and local producers of Thai snacks cannot compete. The impact is a disruption of local culture, the pollution of clean air, soil and
water, dependence on a monetary economy, and ensuring health problems for both the farmer (where majority of the workers are women without pay) and the consumer.

No doubt, the level of women's participation in agriculture is diminishing but these processes of industrialization and urbanization brought many changes like shifting the way to earn money and their livelihood etc. As opportunities for wage of self-employment outside rural households increase along with modernization of the economy, employment participation rates among rural women are becoming similar to those in urban areas. However, the reality is that, as a result of globalization, agriculture has become more market-oriented and it support only large scale commercial farming and export cash-cropping over subsistence production. This has put small farmers, who are most often women into trouble and have not been able to benefit from the new market opportunities.

2) The Commercial Sex Industry

Due to the consequences of a complex interaction between various forces: economic, historical, social and cultural, prostitution is so prominent in the economic and social lives of people in Thailand (Tonguthai 1987:217). In case of Thailand, prostitution is one extreme example where many poor, low-skilled rural women often resist poverty, abusive or dominating husbands or lack of opportunity (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:117). Thus, prostitution provides them with the easiest and quickest way out of poverty. Despite evidence of child prostitution a majority of prostitutes enter the profession willingly, attracted by the high earnings. Most of them are migrated from rural areas.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM: www.unifem-easeasia.org/Gendiss/Gendiss2.htm) reports of Thailand:

"Estimates of the numbers of prostitutions in Thailand vary widely, depending on the source of the figures and the method of estimation. In 1995, the Public Health Ministry estimated that there were 81,384 Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) of whom 16,383 were direct CSWs and 65,001 indirect CSWs. The total number of brothels and the remainder, places where prostitutes were available but not the main business. These figures were based on a twice-
yearly survey of sex establishments related to surveillance of venereal diseases.

The Police Department provides the highest estimate of the numbers of CSWs – 500,000 based on the number of registered entertainment places. The National Commission on Women’s Affairs estimated the number to be 150,000 to be children. Academics from the Population and Social Research Institute of Manifold University estimated the numbers to be between 200,000 and 300,000.

Among the female migrants into Bangkok (Bell 1997:68-69), 90 percent of them work as domestic servants. However, the sexual services industry has by far the larger economic significance. Studies estimate that Thailand has 1 to 2.8 million prostitutes. Most of these commercial sex workers (CSWs) are in the thousands of rural brothels and massage parlors where they earn very low wages and have the highest incidence of AIDS. United Nations agencies fear that one in 60 Thai people will be infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) by the year 2000. The links between regional rural poverty, women’s subordinate economic position, their disadvantageous situation in the labor market, the high levels of recruitment of poor migrant women as sex workers, their generally lower levels of education (or lack of education in technical subjects), and their absence from public decision-making, have contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Thailand. Bank strategies and programs for human resource development should recognize that improvement of women’s socioeconomic status is the key to reducing the transmission rates of HIV/AIDS (ADB, Executive Summary 2008: 6/10). Thai women are using their bodies to reserve rural poverty where the government has failed to do so. Indeed the state created the development policies which have made this flesh trade necessary. Tourism is one of the largest earners of foreign exchange ($7.6 billion), in 1995, 5.5 percent of the GDP, or equivalent to 16 percent of total exports. To measure the contribution of Thai women to export-led growth, and why it has been on the backs on women, we need to compare the $ 7 billion earned by tourism to the value of some of the major export commodities: textiles: $2.8 billion; electrical equipment nearly $8 billion; mechanical parts $5.8 billion; fish products $2.7 billion; rice, tapioca and sorghum $ 1.7 billion. (These accounted for 46 percent of the total exports in 1994)
Over the past few decades, the economies of the countries like Thailand have become strongly dependent on foreign tourism. Thus, the number of Thai women and women from neighbouring countries entering into the entertainment industry are dramatically increasing. Through its emphasis on consumerism, globalization perpetuates the objectification of women. Media is a vehicle for consumerism, creating a sense of deficiency in people that can only be filled through consuming. Women are defined as the commodities for fulfilling men's sense of lack of and desire to control (Khuankaew and Norsworthy 2005:4). Therefore, it is considered that tourism industry is one of the major employers of women workers. The negative side of tourism is its association with Thailand's flourishing sex industry, which recruits women mainly from the poorer regions of Thailand and, increasingly, young women from poor neighboring countries as the opportunity cost to Thai women increases. While occupation is not necessarily a dishonorable profession in Thailand, the number of women in this occupation grew rapidly during the Indo-China war, and this growth has been sustained by tourism.

Along with these, economic miracle is also a model in which low wage female-dominated export industries and tourism, generated wealth based on the multiple exploitation of women. It is indeed an economic “miracle” build literally on the backs of women. It is therefore said that women of Thailand contribute decent enough at the national income at the cost of their body, which is actually brought by the process of globalization.

3) The Homeworking/ Informal Sector

Karl Marx viewed homeworking as the ‘invisible threads’ of capitalism, the ‘outside departments’ of factories. The flexibility provided by homeworking encourages women to combine work, which suits conventional norms & family practices, with domestic responsibilities. Such decisions re-assert the presumption of neo-liberal policies of 1980s that households would absorb the costs of structural adjustments. The advantage of this flexibility also benefitted employers who faced immense volatile and crisis-ridden global markets. Post 1980s, there have been increasingly employer-led moves towards fragmentation, dispersal and sub-contracting involving home-based work even in
countries which had witnessed a feminization of factory labour in the 1970s. This also resulted into a deepening and dynamic relationship between the global economy and the home-based female worker (Sen 2004:84).

According to Susan Horton (Susan 1996), the largest proportion of unpaid family labour of women & extensive incursion of homeworking in rural areas prevails in Thailand. The main reason attributed could be the people opting homeworking as means or “Strategy” of survival, continuing the traditional homeworking business in farming and craft occupations, and new industrial homeworking (gem cutting, flower making and garments) suitting very well the image of housewives.

The enormous size of the ‘informal’ economic sector has been estimated around 4.5 million in early 1990s, and since the economic crisis in mid-1997, this sector has expanded (Andrew et al. 2002). The growth of the informal sector in Thailand has been seen highest in the urban centre because of rapid urbanization, the availability of markets, and industrial concentration. For example, Bangkok and its periphery have the highest rate (61 percent) of employment in the informal sector (Charoenloet 2005:132). And yet they are the most unpaid sector. It is estimated that in most countries unpaid housework is worth the market equivalent of 15-30 percent of GDP. In Thailand this would amount to $20-$40 billion of unpaid housework. This compares the total value of exports of $45 billion in 1994 (Bell 1997:70).

Table 15: Unpaid Family Workers as Proportion of Male and Female Labour Force, 1990 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinagpore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNIFEM (2000: 87)
Therefore, with the speedy economic growth in Thailand over the last 10 years, there has been parallel emergence of many small-scale “the informal sector”. Employing family members or relatives, and not registered with the government, this informal sector is sometimes idealized as the natural safety net or the economy of the poor. In reality, it is only the pressure of competition that drives capital to cut cost either by adopting lean production method or outsourcing its supply through contracting and subcontracting. The recent growth of informal sector is in fact, directly related to subcontracting organized by the trading firms or factories in the formal sector. In this way, what we see as the informal sector is, in fact, the informalization of labour relations in order to cut cost. The major victims of this process are women as they prefer to earn some amount at home besides their household chores.

This sector comprises many activities organized from home: producing silk, textiles, garments, artificial flowers, wood carvings, umbrellas, basketry, processing seafood, and cutting gems. The increase use of subcontracting interfaced well for women, as some of this work could be done within the household, allowing them to combine paid work with their household tasks. At the same time, the flexibility of the demand for labour allowed the release of some women from the household sector for this work on a temporary basis. Often, but not always, this meant migration from the rural areas to the cities for waged employment.

The intrusion of subcontracting system into rural areas accounts for distribution of small, decentralized production units, or “home based workers”. The middleman receives the contract and organizes production through a “putting out” system, with the middlemen supplying the raw materials and buying the finished product. The cheap labour force & hence lower production cost in the countryside has been the main drawing factor for subcontracting with much of this cost having been socialized by rural families and the existence of the large subsistence economy (Charoenloet 2005:132). In the system, employers usually employ workers on short-term contract work and their employment is terminated before the contract expires. The workers are then re-hired on new contacts. This way the employers get around with the law & also get a means of controlling labour
(Charoenloet, Viravidh 1997:207). This kind of system is adopted by multinational companies in order to utilize women’s cheap labour throughout the country.

An estimated 11.2 million Thai women work on “homeworking” through this “putting-out” system at very low wages and with no legal protection. Home workers get employed in production process of many types of industry. A study (Bell 1997:66) has revealed that seven out of ten of the leading export industries opt for putting-out system in this “informal” economy. This also unveils another aspect in which Thai women get exploited with growth in these export industries. Many research on homeworkers states that 60 percent of homeworkers to be women with average age between 21 and 40. As most of these works offer low or no value addition and requiring low skills or skills that can be learned in the household environment, many researchers categorized them as “deskilling” workers. The compensation received by homeworkers is sometimes 30-40 percent less than those of workers in the same type of work in the formal sector. Common problems faced by all informal workers are: lack of credit, low payment, low skill and irregular work, work longer hours, no protection by any labour law (Nirathorn 1997:168).

Besides these, the problems get magnified with fluctuations of order in the homework due to seasonal nature of market. Homeworkers work day and night during seasonal rushes or they have to remain idle with no work at all in the following month due to seasonal slump (Nirumol 1997:166-67).

Producers, in order to reduce their production costs, prefer hiring people in the informal sector as it enables them to pay low remuneration as well as offers employment flexibility after the abolishment of “temporary employment” from the labour legislation in late eighties. Health and safety standards in the work place are not considered a necessity as they are passed on to be the concerns of the homeworkers themselves. The census record does not include categories that are appropriate for homeworkers. This partly due to the fact that homeworkers are hidden labour and sometimes homework is inconsistent (Nirathorn 1997:166).
Thailand for as long as thousand years has been practicing homeworking. Silk weaving is one instance which was at one time, a mere hobby for women (Ibid:164). But ironically, the contribution of Thai women has never been appreciated well. The resilience of Thai women can be seen in their not accepting joblessness as their fate but quickly using their cooking and negotiating skills to get a space (on the footpath) to sell products with minimal investment. Women’s informal jobs have ranged from fortune telling, food (curry and rice, noodle, sweet) vendors to vegetable and fruit sellers (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:117). Another important aspect of women’s work is “subsistence” activity which includes sewing, cooking, petty-trading, and scavenging, needed to supplement family incomes which fall, as most do, below subsistence levels. Like unpaid agricultural labour it is very hard to put a value on this activity. For the majority of the 12 million families who live below the poverty line, and the 8.4 million women listed as “not in the labour force” (this includes 3.7 million in “housework”) (Bell 1997:70).

The role played by Thai women should not be underrated as they contribute to a great extent to the society as unpaid family workers or domestic workers. In an economy where investment capital, money and other resources are scarce, poor families can always rely on their family labour as a major input for income-raising production. The employment situation shows that a higher proportion of women are employed in agriculture, followed by commerce, services and manufacturing, than in other sectors (Ghosh 1990:184).

Following the onset of economic crisis, many women formerly employed in industry have restored to working in the informal sector, often working at home accepting subcontracting work such as sewing cloths, weaving fishnets, making various handicrafts and producing artificial flowers. Recent reports estimate that around 720,000 women now fall into this category. They work 8 to 15 hours per day and fall outside of legal coverage or holidays and health and safety legislation (Bangkok Post: 2: May 2002)

4) Thai Women in Industrial Production/ Manufacturing Sector

Following a shift of policy emphasis from import substitution to export promotion, Thailand's manufacturing sector grew at an average annual rate of 8.6 percent during
1980-1989, compared with 4.5 percent for the agricultural sector. The share of the manufacturing sector in GDP rose from 21 percent in 1980 to 24.7 percent in 1990, while the share of the agricultural sector fell from 20.6 percent to 14.4 percent. Thailand's role as an exporter of primary commodities has also diminished as exports of manufacturing goods have grown, by 1987, manufacturing exports made up 50.8 percent of the value of the total exports compared to only 5 percent in 1970. At the same time the share of primary exports, which was as high as 89.5 percent in 1970, decreased to 48.3 percent (Pupphavesa 2002:6).

The rapid industrial growth (Maniemaí Thongyou 2003:3) of the decade of 1997 has substantially affected Thailand economic structure by shifting agricultural sector to manufacturing and service sectors i.e. since the 1960s the agricultural sector has declined, while the manufacturing and service sectors have become more important. The share of the manufacturing sector (Pupphavesa 2002:6) in GDP rose from 21.7 percent in 1980 to 24.7 percent in 1990, while the share of the agricultural sector fell from 20.6 percent to 14.4 percent. Thailand's role as an exporter of primary commodities has also diminished as exports of manufacturing goods have grown. By 1987, manufacturing exports made up 50.8 percent of the value of the total exports compared to only 5 percent in 1970. At the same time the share of primary exports, which was as high as 89.5 percent in 1970, and decreased to 48.3 percent (Ibid: 6). However, the growth has not been evenly distributed as it has benefited mostly men and neglected women especially manufacturing sector. Women accounted for only 11.6 percent of the officially employed labour force in manufacturing in the late 1980s, but they accounted for 80 percent of the total employment in ten of the largest export commodities: canned and frozen fish products, textiles, jewellery, cotton, fabric, footwear, electrical parts, leather goods, frozen foods, and knitwear. This means that women produced around $ 30 billion of exports. There were 545,000 women working in manufacturing in 1994, around 40 percent of the manufacturing work force (Bell 1997:65-66).
Table 16: Women’s Share of Manufacturing Employment and Manufacturing Share of GDP in Five ASEAN Countries, 1970-1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women’s share of Employment (%)</th>
<th>Manufacturing</th>
<th>Manufacturing Sector as % of GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Praparpun (1999:126)

Besides this, earning differences between the sexes are clearly substantial. Such inequalities in earning are greatest in manufacturing industries in which the public sector plays a very small role. The average male wage in manufacturing in the Bangkok area was $250 per month ($170 outside of Bangkok) and for women $168 a month ($112 outside of Bangkok). This constitutes “super-exploitation” as these official wage levels are insufficient to guarantee minimum subsistence for those living in the metropolitan area. And unofficially perhaps, only 15 percent of Thai workers receive the minimum wage. Another measure of the rate of exploitation of workers in the manufacturing sector is the ratio of total earning to the value added in production which has been steadily declining: from 26 percent in 1970, 16 percent in 1990, and an estimated 10 percent in 1993 (Bell 1997:65-66).

Table 17: Average Earning of Full-time Workers (15 years and over) in the Non-agricultural Sectors by Sex and Industry, Thailand, 1983 (Baht per month)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Female/Male Ratio</th>
<th>Female Share of Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All non-agricultural sectors</td>
<td>608.1</td>
<td>430.9</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>34.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and quarrying</td>
<td>572.6</td>
<td>495.9</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>558.6</td>
<td>396.3</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>40.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Thailand, industries that are universally identified as being dominated by females (textiles, clothing and shoes – 76 percent female) have the lowest sex differences earnings ratio (only 0.61) (Tonguthai 1987:205). Along with this, the devaluation of the bhat has negative effects on the electronics industry, which imports 90 percent of its components. This industry is a major employer of young female labour.

It is undeniable that the role of Thai women in the manufacturing sector is quite remarkable. Although the total number of male and female wage workers in this sector is markedly different, women predominate in export industries. In 7 out of 10 important export industries women constitute more than 80 percent of the workforce (Levine 1997: 29). Such industries include integrated circuit boards and electronic parts, garments and textiles, food, jewellery and precious stones, leatherware and footwear, and cotton yarn fiber. These industries brought in Bt 260 billion in export earnings in 1989. A large number of women were engaged in the urban and rural informal sector as subcontract workers in weaving, artificial flower making, wood carving, umbrellas, and food processing. Female employment is favoured in such industries as textiles, electronics, handicrafts, and food and beverages since they require only a low skilled workforce.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Male Wages</th>
<th>Female Wages</th>
<th>Female/Male Ratio</th>
<th>Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food, beverages, tobacco and snuff</td>
<td>563.4</td>
<td>375.0</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>36.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile, clothing and shoes</td>
<td>653.6</td>
<td>405.2</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>76.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>546.1</td>
<td>394.4</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>26.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction and utility</td>
<td>604.8</td>
<td>480.4</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>16.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole sale and retail trade</td>
<td>674.9</td>
<td>430.7</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>37.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, property and business</td>
<td>1,047.9</td>
<td>926.8</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>35.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication, transport and shortage</td>
<td>650.2</td>
<td>855.7</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>10.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government services</td>
<td>571.7</td>
<td>570.5</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>10.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>596.1</td>
<td>385.5</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>50.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity not adequately described</td>
<td>1,379.5</td>
<td>476.1</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>19.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, women are seen as easily trainable and docile. Some may claim that these women are unskilled and the value of their contribution cannot be compared with higher rated jobs. But it is quite obvious that in the last decade women workers have made significant contributions to the country’s economic growth.

Data on female labour-intensive industries (where the proportion of female labour is higher than the proportion of male labour in total employment) in 1980 and 1989 reflect the increasing importance of women in those manufacturing and service industries that were linked directly or indirectly via subcontracting to foreign direct investment (Kurian 1999:187). In 1993, there were 12 million workers in manufacturing, commerce and service industries of whom slightly more than half were women (6.14 million).

The available data on women reveals that the fragmentation in women’s work and lives which suggest that there was a substantial increase in the numbers of women employed temporary in commerce and manufacturing. The demand for women in export-oriented manufacturing was closely linked to their relatively low wage costs (Kurian 1999:188).

Along with the forces of globalization, the economic crisis of 1997 (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5) gave a major impact on marginal farming areas such as the Northeast, where 36.6 percent of the population lives, and where livelihood prospects are lowest. These areas have become heavily dependent on the wage remittances of young female industrial workers and the savings of seasonal labour migrants. Due to involvement and improvement in technologies as a part of globalization, it is likely that reduction in demand for low-skilled workers in the future will have a significantly greater negative impact on women than on men. For example, since women comprise more than 90 percent of the sewing section, computerized processes in the garment industry will replace a large number of women workers. Although existing workers will be trained to familiarize them with new technology, employers prefer workers with some technical background or higher level of education, and women are less likely to meet that requirement than men. Let us now have a closer look at the plight of women in the
manufacturing and other electronic sector; and later see its implication within the bigger framework of globalization.

**Condition of Women in Manufacturing Sector**

A study of manufacturing sector was chosen in order to provide more concrete insight into the gender dimensions of trade, production, hierarchy in job and discrimination on various grounds.

Manufacturing has been the key sector in Thailand's economic development since the 1960s. The result has been a major restructuring of the Thai economy. Such structural change has obviously affected employment and the social aspects of Thai worker's lives (UNESCAP 1987:27). And this is one of sectors where maximum numbers of women workers are absorbed. The preferential demand for female labour in such industries seems to be due to the docility of women in the face of low wages, long hours, congested working and living conditions, and extremely strict supervision of work. These women are employed with no training and are dismissed upon marriage or childbirth. Since there is a steady supply of female labour, the employers feel no need to improve working conditions (Alwis 2000:96). Thus, Thailand’s growth in manufacturing, particularly export industries, has relied on a large, unskilled and poorly educated labor force, typically young, unskilled female labor migrants from poor rural regions who wish to earn wages to remit to their parents, and who are willing to work for minimum wages or less. Furthermore, with the development of more efficient and quality-oriented modern technology and methods of management and production Thai economy moves away from low-skilled manufacturing to highly skilled and knowledge-intensive activities. In this whole process more of the benefits goes to male workers and even if it benefited to women workers, that will of some groups of women who are educated. Therefore, in any case this will hit hardest to the unskilled, poorly educated female labors only.

The available resources reveals that highest labour demand for young women is in the manufacturing and service sectors, the later including the commercial sex industry. Women working in this sector (manufacturing) have faced maximum number of
problems as this is one sector where firms are taking much interest. In order to earn profit various indecent and gender insensitive policies are introduced.

These trade policies that are not gender aware and gender sensitive has adverse impact on women's well being especially in the case of export processing zones and in the clothing textiles and light manufacturing industries, where the expansion of trade is based on access to low wage female labour. This is often accompanied by inadequate protection for women's health and safety. Furthermore, women continue to shoulder the double burden of children and housework. Minimum wage laws and other labour rights do not address these concerns.

Therefore, it will be right to note that Thai women play a substantial role in the national economy regardless of the laws and plans which are not gender sensitive. By 1980, Thai women comprised 49.6 per cent of the population. Of the country's 23.1 million women, 45.6 per cent were in the labour force. Among the 10.66 million women in the labour market, 74 per cent were employed in agriculture, 7.1 per cent in industry and 18.9 per cent in commerce, services and other sectors. (UNESCAP 1987:24)

Table 18: Size of Enterprises and Number of Employees by Sex, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Enterprise</th>
<th>Total No. of Employees</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>370,355</td>
<td>211,081</td>
<td>159,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>458,565</td>
<td>278,475</td>
<td>180,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>639,217</td>
<td>375,227</td>
<td>263,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-49</td>
<td>1,007,709</td>
<td>584,294</td>
<td>423,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99</td>
<td>713,219</td>
<td>402,932</td>
<td>310,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-299</td>
<td>1,369,432</td>
<td>730,114</td>
<td>639,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-499</td>
<td>694,328</td>
<td>341,271</td>
<td>353,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-999</td>
<td>796,455</td>
<td>358,787</td>
<td>437,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 or more</td>
<td>1,758,177</td>
<td>771,943</td>
<td>986,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,807,367</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,054,126</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,753,241</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Labour Studies and Planning Division, Department of Labour Protection and Welfare.*

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The table shows that by 2000, almost 60 percent of employees are working in industrial enterprises employing 100 or more workers. This indicates the further industrialization of the economy and may lead to the expansion of enterprise unions. It is noticeable that women are disproportionately represented in large enterprises. This indicates the predominance of women’s employment in the export-oriented sector and in enterprises with foreign investment (Andrew et al. 2002: 6).

Women generally have lower levels of marketable vocational skills than men. This is a major barrier to their benefiting from current and future opportunities in the labour force and in self-employment (National Commission on Women 1996). Increasing women’s access to technical and non-traditional skills training and re-training on-the-job must be given highest priority, including the use of affirmative action measures. However, most of the firms are giving less importance to women workers regarding training, promotion etc. That is why level of job insecurity especially for the young unskilled is very high. Therefore, Falkus (2000:175-94) argued that, in Thailand women are postponing marriage and child-bearing in order to save their job and to take advantage of the employment opportunities that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.

The sex composition of the work-force was the most significant determining variable in order to study the sources of wage differentials among manufacturing industries in Thailand. A higher proportion of females in an industry were associated with lower wage. It was suggested that there is a distortion in the Thai labour market where institutional forces are such that “males are paid higher wages than female workers merely because it is the socially accepted practice unrelated to their contribution to output” (Tonguthai 1987:219).

Thailand began to get a larger charge of investment in electronics in 1990s (Kaur 2004:117). The electronics industry is a good example of the two processes which is carried out by globalization i.e. manufacture of certain products through sub-contact by using cheap labour (mostly of women) and final sale or assembly of the components took
place in the developed countries. This whole process benefited only the developed countries at the cost of Third world countries.

The general profile of women’s employment presented above provides a context for examining young women’s employment patterns in manufacturing. This, in turn, will set the stage for the case studies presented here of women working in the electronic industry as this is one of the industries where FDI flows well with the view to exploit cheap labour of women.

Women workers and working conditions in electronic factories

The electronics industry has been in existence in Thailand since 1974. In the 1990s, Thailand began to get a larger share of investment in electronics. The electronics industry in Thailand is placed high on the list of firms given preferential treatment in the matter of foreign exchange regulations and profit repatriation. The operation of such industries is seen by the government as generating employment, increasing skill formation of the workers and encouraging transfer of technology. About 98 percent of the necessary raw materials (Charoenloet and Soonthornhdada 1988:213-214) to be assembled are imported from outside or from the mother firm while the products of the subsidiary firms are wholly exported, mostly to the mother firm.

Table 19: Electronic Equipment Exports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Exports as % GDP, 1999 to USA</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>IT Equipment as % of Total Exports, 1999</th>
<th>Total External Debt as % of Exports, 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Asian Development Bank (2001)
Women dominate in electronics production in the Southeast Asian countries including Thailand. The majority of these women are single, young and mainly from rural areas. In the global electronics factory, working conditions vary according to the location of the factory and market or business demand. The working week (Sen 2004:121) is six days while the workers typically work 12-hour shifts, with two or three breaks. Overtime and shift work is prevalent. Existing legislation against night work for women was waived to allow electronics companies to introduce rotating shift work and permanent night shifts. Most factories also have a system of diligence pay to promote maximum attendance, and a bonus system to increase output and maximize competition between workers.

The system of work relies heavily on the ideology termed ‘Taylorism’ (Charoenloet and Soonthorndhada 1988:215). ‘Taylorism’ is based on a strict division of labour between those who command and those who execute the work. The flow of information is a one-way process wholly controlled by the top. Generally workers are grouped into two categories: daily-wage workers and monthly paid employees. Daily-wage workers can be further divided into three sub-categories: direct producer, line-leader and foreman.

Factory work is characterized by its flexibility and the hierarchical system (Sen 2004:120) in place is central to maintaining work discipline. The strict hierarchy is reinforced through both covert and overt means in the factory. Occupational differentials are also based on lines of ethnicity, gender and age. With more migrant workers recruited for factory work, nationality also plays a role in the power relations structures. The migrant women are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchical system which is shaped by foreign industrial relations systems. The wages of women workers vary across the region, with Thai women paid lower wages than their Singaporean and Malaysian counterparts.

Younger unskilled women and men, employed in smaller firms or employees located in the provinces more often than not work longer than legally stipulated hours, are forced to work overtime (often without receiving legally stipulated compensation) and are often denied the holidays and leave to which are legally entitled. Work hours regularly exceed
the stipulated maximum. In many areas of the service sector and smaller work places, 12-hour days are common, often without any overtime payment. (Andrew et al. 2002:17)

The percentage of women (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5) engaged in white-collar occupations have increased with improvement in educational attainment, but women still account for a very small part of total employment in these occupations. The proportion of women in clerical jobs rose from less than one percent in 1971 to over five percent in 1995.

The manufacture of integrated circuits is mainly the assembly of components. To this end, young female workers are subjected to a system of 'chained' production. Workers had to work long hours (9 hours a day), the social facilities were negligible and working conditions were unpleasant due to the small space of the building (Charoenloet and Soonthorndhada 1988:218).

The leaders of the production line are mostly women. This is because they are thought to inspire confidence among women workers. They listen to all problems, personal as well as those relating to the work of the workers. Line-leaders are usually promoted from the ranks of ordinary workers on the basis of outstanding job performance. The immediate supervisor of the line-leader is the supervisor or foreman who is mostly a man (Charoenloet and Soonthorndhada 1988:222-224). Many of the women workers especially the assembly line workers cannot hope to gain many practical skills. This is in fact one of the main reasons why women workers do not progress in their careers. They are locked into a production process whose organization and technology is controlled by the multinationals. At this point, the workers complained that given the same number of years' work and experience, women still have less opportunity for advancement in their careers than do men. The situation of unequal pay for equal work is the cause of discouragement among women workers and has become an issue of conflict between workers and the management. Although the Thai constitution recognizes the right of women and men to equal work, in practice, this is not enforced.
Usually young and educated women who cannot find local employment in the province are the most preferred workers by the factories. They have therefore uprooted themselves and join the production line as assembly workers. Since they too specialize in one task of production, professional skills are not required. The disadvantages of the job are that it is monotonous, repetitive and carries no responsibility. The scope of the training especially for the assembly workers is very narrow. The only thing it requires is that, the hands and body must be moved in a particular way to accomplish certain tasks. That is why these young women have come under the unskilled and less paid works.

The above statements carried out that women workers cannot gain much in terms of acquiring skills, firstly, because the workers have no access to knowledge of the production process, and their knowledge of the activity of the firm is very fragmented. Secondly, the repetitiveness of work excludes any initiative on the part of the workers. Lastly, the nature of such type of investment allows the firm to overlook the problem of upgrading the skills of workers. For example, last year, a large number of workers were asked to quit their job. This was called a ‘voluntary lay-off’ and the economic recession was cited as the reason. Several ‘voluntary lay-off’ workers have since been reemployed by the firm. The injustice is that they are receiving the same salary as before and have lost their seniority which is an important factor in promotion (Ibid:224-225).

It is clear from the above statements that in an export-oriented industry, the intense and repetitive nature of the production of integrated circuits requires the presence of fresh, young and single women who are not only highly enthusiastic but also disciplined and obedient. These workers are subjected to a double work load, that is, the intensification of work as well as the extension of the work day. Such working conditions have led to a labour force which is ‘prematurely burned-out.’ In such cases, according to the workers, the only alternative left to the worker is to lay-off voluntarily, because of either deterioration in health or to be married, and to find another job.’ Thus, the high turnover of labour means (Charoenloet and Soonthorndhada 1988:235) the recruitment policy of the company needs to ensure a steady supply of labour.
Impact of Globalization on Women

With globalization of capital and flexible employment, labour was seen as more fragmented into irregular, temporary and subcontract workers, informal workers and home-base workers. So much so that the identity of the working class which founded the basis for solidarity actions was seen to have shattered as to be inoperative as a unifying force for collective action (Charoenloet 2005:137).

Furthermore, globalization stimulates new forms of regulation, coordination and economic management which may transform the relationship between states and societies and this transformation brought changes at community and social institutions at various levels. This is wrong to assume that this transformation will be explicitly beneficial to women because in some countries, export promotion may shift resources from women’s own account actively towards the exporter. This includes land, tax grants etc. Export subsidies may adversely affect women’s income, trading and employment position. Thailand is one of the prominent countries which come under these categories.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, with the globalization of the economy, the labour-intensive industries in Thailand have been rapidly losing their competitiveness. Moreover, they were unable to respond to the market quickly because of technological and skill development constraints. Currently about 70 percent of the country’s workforce possess only primary education (Ibid: 124). Above all, as women in a vulnerable and impoverished sector, they face the additional inequalities of gender like unequal wages, no maternity benefits, sexual harassment, a poor nutrition and ill health (Joshi 2007:2). They are widely involved in variety of invisible work and often shoulder the dual burden of paid and unpaid labour which tends to be ignored in calculations of labour.

However, it is not sufficient to draw a conclusion on the status of Thai women from these aggregate numbers. In order to understand how well Thai women fare in development, it is necessary to analyze them in the context of social and economic changes. Development processes had a contradictory impact on Thai women. They have gained in some aspects and lost in others, and the gain is not even for all Thai women. The situations of Thai women in health, education, migration, employment and political decision-making have several inequalities.
1. Health

In general, there has been a remarkable improvement in the health condition of both men and women in Thailand during past two decades (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:99). However, improved health care facilities are meant for all i.e. health care are still not accessible to most rural women in the northeast (NE) than that in the central plains (CP). This is generally meant for well educated classes and at urban areas.

The past achievements in health care are overshadowed by the recent outbreak of AIDS. During the height of economic boom, the first case of an AIDS patient was detected in the year 1984, but the government dismissed its presence fearing it would disturb Thailand’s lucrative tourist industry. Thus, the HIV infected among women is increasing day by day (Ibid: 100).

Another aspect of health issue which is of concern to women labour is their exposure to substances like lead, aluminium, trichloroethylene, various acids and alkalines, and many other of the hundreds of chemicals used in the production process especially in the electronics industry (Asian Monitor Resource Centre 1987) in March 1993, National Regional Industrial Estate (NRIE) workers reported deaths from unexplained causes, starting with headaches that developed into inflamed stomachs and vomiting.

Problems associated with poor workplace health and safety standards became the subject of national and international attention during the 1990s in the wake of a series of spectacular accidents that left a trial of dead, maimed and injured in their wake. The incident that highlighted most dramatically the health and safety dangers face by the industrial workforce was the fire at Kedar Industries (Thailand) that left 188 dead and almost 500 injured (Andrew et al.2002:32). Another problem of women associated with the rising participation rate of women in this sector is related to a decline in fertility and the number of children in the household. As domestic labour for women decreases, they are able to spend more time in economic pursuits. These women workers are unable to cope up with domestic chores after long hours of work at the factory. Further, the women often work in unsafe conditions in unregulated factories, putting them at risk for injuries and health problems.
Workers in factories (Charoenloet 2005:139) are more exposed to illness related to work, occupational disease and accidents. This is a critical issue in Thailand because companies see this as cost. Since the wages are low, they have to work extra hours to make enough to send home. This stress of overworking further compromises their health. Victims are usually laid off once their health deteriorates. Unable to find new jobs, they tend to be marginalized in society and become poorer. This is also one of the reasons that number of women population is large in poverty.

2. Education

The Thai government introduced compulsory universal education in 1920 which had a dramatic impact on women’s education (Mahajani 1978:65). Thailand began to popularize modern education after 1932. By the mid 1980s, Thai’s literacy rate reached 90 percent. However, women’s illiteracy rate is higher than men’s. This means that the majority of illiterates are women. This may be partly due to the higher illiteracy rate among older women. There is a marked improvement in the rate of enrolment but there is a high rate of dropouts at each level especially at the tertiary level. Only 71.8 percent of the rural working women finished four years of primary schooling while 16.4 percent of them never have any formal education (NESDB 1992).

Table 20: Educational Level by Gender (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-formal Education</td>
<td>30.66</td>
<td>21.05</td>
<td>18.75</td>
<td>12.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>63.75</td>
<td>69.47</td>
<td>70.81</td>
<td>72.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The gender bias is more apparent in the selection of fields of study at the post-secondary level. While men opt for technical colleges, women tend to enroll in non-formal education and teacher training colleges. Women have very little technical education. (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:103) That is one of the reasons that women workers remain at the lower level of job hierarchy as they are unable to access and cope up with the new technologies and heavy machineries which has come as a strategies of globalization.

Table 21: Vocational Students and Their Fields of Study, Thailand, 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Certificate Level</th>
<th>Diploma Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>18,628</td>
<td>5,788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>71,192</td>
<td>1,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Economic</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>26,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Crafts</td>
<td>2,410</td>
<td>1,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>5,746</td>
<td>28,296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


3. Participation in Decision Making

Today women worldwide hold only 18 percent of seats in national parliaments. Moreover, women constitute only dismal 2.2 and 5.5 per cent of the IMF’s and World Ban’s boards of governors respectively (WEDO 2002:27). In case of Thailand, even though women are highly active in various urban modern sectors ranging academic to business, they do not have an equal share in decision making in the public and private sectors. In the civil service sector, 52 percent of bureaucrats are women but they have been concentrated at the lower level positions. These statistics of civil services are similar to the private modern sector in Bangkok, where three quarters (74 percent) of the administrative, executive, and managerial positions are occupied by men. (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:107-108) In the local governing system, women
have traditionally been excluded. Number of female officials is still very small or less than 1 percent in all positions at the local governing system. The first women MP was elected in 1948, fifteen years after the promulgation of the Election Act of 1933.

Although, Thai women were given equal voting rights with men in the first Thai constitution of 1933, Thai women are underrepresented in the political arena. In 1995, 300,000 more women than men actually went to the polls, but the proportion of women in Parliament today is less than six percent. Since 1932, there have been only eight women in the Thai Cabinet. In 1997, Parliament had 22 female members, or only 5.6 percent—about half the world average (ADB, Women, Politics and Law 2008: 4/10).

Participation of women in village councils is low because public representation is perceived to be a masculine domain, and because business meetings are often held outside the village and late into the night, making it more difficult for women to attend. Since important economic decisions are made by the council, such as the location of a new well or the selection of representatives from the village to take part in training programs on new farming technology, women’s interests are adversely affected by their low representation.

Table 22: Provincial and Local Government Composition by Sex, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Percent Female</th>
<th>Percent Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provincial Government</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Governor</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Officers</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy District Officers</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>4,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elected Local Government</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Council Members</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>2,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Council Members</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>2,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub District Heads</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>98.9</td>
<td>7,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Heads</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>59,973</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior.*
Not only in political field, women workers are not proportionately represented, even in the industry dominated by women such as textiles and electronics. It shows that there was no women representative in the male-dominant electricity trade union. In textiles (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:110), even though the number of women workers was five times that of men, their union representation was only two-thirds that of men.

At the other end of the professional spectrum (Edwards and Roces 2000:259), women’s involvement in politics and government administration remains limited. Thai women were granted the right to vote in 1933 a year after the government system changed from an Absolute Monarchy to a Constitutional Monarchy. However, in the sixty years since then women’s share of power at both a national level (as MPs or Senators) and at a local level (as council administrators) remains low. The number of women working as administrators in the State Bureaucracy is increasing but the numbers are still extremely low.

Therefore, it is said that underrepresentation of women in decision making leads the women in more vulnerable position as they are already lagging behind in various sectors in this era of globalization. At this point, Alison M. Jaggar (2001:309) argued that the present organization of the global economy undermines democracy by rendering the sovereignty of poor nations increasingly meaningless and further excluding the poorest and most vulnerable people across the world. Many women, who are disproportionately represented among the poorest and most vulnerable of all, are effectively disenfranchised. The virtual absence even of privileged women from the decision-making processes of such bodies as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization reflects the minimal influence exercised by women at the highest levels of global politics.

4. Migration and Employment

Labour migration has increased over time both in number and frequency, with much of the movement being seasonal or temporary but repeated. Most of the labours are from rural areas migrated to Bangkok in order to look for job for their livelihood. Among them, young women are represented to maximum number in various sectors.
With limited education and job opportunities in rural areas, women migrated to other areas, especially to Bangkok. During 1976 to 1988 all regions saw more women than men heading toward Bangkok, and the largest portion was from the poorest region, the northeast. And it has been increasing. The migration stream consists largely of young people. Seventy percent of the migrants concentrate in the 10-34 year age bracket, in which the median age is 22.6 (NSO 1992). Women who migrate to Bangkok are mostly employed in sales and services. When considering the wages of the total population, the government salary scale is fixed, but in the private sector, women tend to be hired in at the lower level of the salary (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:105).

Table 23: Migration Rate in Thailand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Origin</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>833,400 (11.6)</td>
<td>833,900 (11.7)</td>
<td>1,66,900 (23.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>2,365,400 (33.1)</td>
<td>3,115,100 (43.0)</td>
<td>5,480,500 (76.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Country</td>
<td>3,198,400 (44.7)</td>
<td>3,949,000 (44.3)</td>
<td>7,147,400 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although the overall male to female sex ratio of migrants in 1993 was 123 males for every 100 females, these figures are misleading in terms of actual gender patterns. Analysis of the age structure of migrants of Bangkok shows that, in the youngest age group (11-19 years), there are more than twice as many women than men. About three-quarters of women migrants to Bangkok are single, migrate alone, and come in search of employment (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5).

Women's productive activities are assumed to decline when they are no longer involved in agricultural task or in rural cottage industries. A major factor motivating rural Thai women to migrate to urban areas, particularly Bangkok, is the easy availability of jobs. Compared with their male counterparts, female migrants in Bangkok have been more successful in finding employment, suggesting that the urban demand for unskilled labour is biased in favour of women (Tonguthai 1987:211-212). Women migrant workers are the
most vulnerable of all workers even in good times; in bad times such as these, they are even worse off because they tend to come low down in the policy priorities of both host and home governments.

In factories or as labourers, women often get paid less than men. The majority of women work in the informal sector vendors, hawkers, maids, outworkers (subcontractors) where returns are small and uncertain. In the export industry (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1997:106), women significantly outnumber men (the majority of the labour forces are women being 70 percent of the workers in electronic, textile, processed food, jewelry, footwear, and leatherwork). Most of the export wealth is created by them. But the majority of them have low education and low salaries. Many of them work in hazardous and unhygienic condition. The migration from rural areas occurs not because of industrial replacement but because women are pushed out by poverty and an overexploited natural environment.

Poverty, rising urban labour demands, and changes to traditional agricultural systems that mean increased input costs among smallholder farmers in the poorer regions have spurred labour migration to Bangkok and other urban centres. Young women are particularly affected. Their labour on the family farms has become less valuable than their capacity to earn income, but the opportunities to earn that income are far from home. The high level of female rural-to-urban migration may be explained not only in terms of the demand and preference for cheap female labour by certain industries, but also by cultural emphasis on the duty of a daughter to serve her parents.

It is believed that dramatic economic growth of Thailand has provided various opportunities for women to participate in various occupations, including those occupations once dominated by men like gaining managerial positions in big companies. But in true sense poverty is caused by SPAs that have been enacted by the country of Thailand. It has increased pressure on women to enter the paid labour force (UNIFEM 1995). At this point, Bakker (1997:9) argued that increased access to paid employment does not necessarily improve women's welfare. Since entry into the workforce is often a
survival strategy adopted by women in response to increased levels of poverty. Therefore, women workers are still facing numerable difficulties both at the workplace and also at the domestic front. Today, this dramatically changing process of globalization is putting more and more burden on women and situated them into marginalized position in almost every field.

Major Findings:

1) In process of globalization, in export-oriented industry, a case study of the EPZ: electronic factories, reveals that women work mostly in the lowest jobs and have little bargaining power and marginalized from various angles.

2) The strategy of liberalized global trade brought many changes including tougher competition among women international and domestic traders, more resources and skills are needed to compete, leaving fewer opportunities for women who are poor and is advantaged and/or have a high burden of reproductive tasks.

3) In the industrial sector, EPZ factories have created jobs and seem to guarantee basic gender rights (i.e. employment after giving birth) but trade competition pressures lower labour standards and result in every poor working conditions and wages. Export of minerals has increased male jobs but undermines income-generating activities by women while also affecting women's health.

4) In the EPZ factories, women workers have experienced an increase in work burden as their reproductive tasks at home are not shared by their husbands. Moreover, they spend more of their income on the household than men.

5) The SAP contributed in deteriorating the standard of living of Thai women because SAP austerity measures require tighter social welfares, less credit, and lower wages. In order to have access to foreign markets and win favour with international financial institutes, government is cutting expenditure on public infrastructure, education, health care, and public services. The immediate adverse effects were felt mostly by women and the poor who were forced to make do with much diminished household budgets for the needs of their family.

6) Even in the agricultural sector, export crops and their earning are mainly controlled by men. Women's production is mostly limited to food for the family
and the domestic market. With the process of globalization women are facing double and multiple burdens as most of the male members of the family are migrated to cities in search of job.

7) It is also reported by the poor women traders that reproductive tasks and income-generating pressures hamper the efficiency of their trading activities.

8) Studies have shown that the labour segments where women’s employment is concentrated are typically those associated with low wages, few opportunities for skill improvement and training, inadequate welfare facilities and are generally at the lowest rungs of the labour force. At the same time, studies have shown that much of this employment has no long-term prospects. Therefore, high level of job insecurity is prevalent among women workers as multinational firms are giving less opportunities of promotion, training etc. to the female workers. Above all, due to increase the development of technologies, machineries which are brought by globalization are meant to be handled by male workers only. Therefore, women remains at the lower levels in the job hierarchy i.e. working women are heavily concentrated in lower-level white-collar jobs, and underrepresented in managerial and professional positions.

9) To attract foreign tourist, the government is also supporting the flesh business where number of women from poor families were exploited. Number of AIDS patient is increasing day by day in the country.

Available evidence on employment of women in the modern sector of Thailand is sufficient to conclude that the existing concentration in certain occupations and positions is due to deliberate discriminatory practice against women with the process of globalization. At the same time, society’s attitude (Tonguthai 1987:218) regarding the “proper” role of women and women’s own perception of what their primary goals in life should be are important influences. The enrolment of young women in educational and training institutions is still overwhelmingly in traditionally female subjects which could be the result of women viewing work as extension of their role as wife and mother.

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Women are (Posusney and Eleanor 2003:16) especially vulnerable to the effects of economic reform and structural adjustment programmes (ERSAPs). Women also tend to be concentrated in clerical positions for which supply exceeds demand and so when laid off they face more difficulty in finding alternative jobs.

If society’s attitude is that women should retain their “femininity,” with aggressive and independent behaviour being unacceptable, occupations such as nursing, secretarial work and teaching will continue to be preferred by women to engineering and architecture. The former group of women is seen to be a natural extension of the societal ideal of women. Women also seem to shrink from being given authority and responsibility. Even women workers majorly accepted the faster promotion of their male colleagues as “nature” or even “appropriate”. It is therefore not surprising that high positions are awarded to men who have more positive expectations from their work (Tonguthai 1987:209).

At the same time, women continued to play an important role in the non-market labour segment providing substantial labour input in the domestic chores, such as cooking and cleaning which hardly count as work because it is unpaid.

Women in Thailand, for a long time contributed to the economic well-being of their country. The process of globalization which is very much urban centered, have opened up varieties of new opportunities (both in the formal and informal sectors) for women. Participation rate have increased in both urban and rural areas, but a closer look at the occupational distribution and earning reveals that Thai women are still concentrated in very few types of employment, mostly of low status and with little rewards. At the same time, for unskilled women with little education, the sexual service industry offers a very lucrative return. Given society’s tacit acceptance of this profession, more and more women have recently been induced to choose this alternative over low paid, unskilled jobs (Ibid:218).

Prior to the election of Thaksin Shinawatra’s Thai Rak Thai Party to government in January 2001, a number of promises were made regarding labour law reform. However,
no much change has been seen. Struggle and state repression have been the norm over many years, and real reform is long overdue. Implementation of laws and regulations has been weak. There is a gap between the law and practice in contemporary relations, the impact of the economic crisis, since mid-1997, has probably seen the gap widen (Andrew et al. 2002:33-34).

The different pressures like flexibility of the demand for labour household responsibility, work at temporary basis etc. led, in some circumstances, to increased feminization of women’s lives. Feminization occurred via worsening income distribution (normal in the first stages of trade liberalization and market-oriented economic reform) where low-income families are forced to seek temporary/ permanent/ waged or other employment. Feminization happened through the demand for cheap labour as women’s relatively lower wages could provide a comparative advantage in export-oriented industrialization (Cagatay and Ozler 1995). But feminization in the context of increased vertical and horizontal segmentation of the labour markets can and has resulted in many cases in women being associated with the more vulnerable segments of the labour force and the category of workers on which the risks of production are downloaded. At the same time, their work in the non-market labour segment continued as part of the accepted division of work in society. The pressures for adequate income often forced them to work simultaneously in two or more of these segments, each segment associated with different identities and responsibilities. In this process, the majority of women tended to operate and survive in increasingly fragmented existences with increasingly separate and multiple spheres of production and reproduction (Kurian 1999:179-80).

Nevertheless, feminization of the labour force continues to be encouraged by the widespread perception that female employees are more tractable and subservient to managerial authority, less prone to organize into unions, more willing to accept upward job mobility and easier to dismiss using life-cycle criteria such as marriage and childbirth. This has underlined the inequality in employment.
In this period of globalization, much attention has been given to the notion that the state's role is reduced. That is why the government is giving less attention to the equal treatment of men and women in the workplace especially regarding wage differences. While there is no country in the world where women earn more than men (New Scientist: 27 April 2002:37), in developed countries the gap is shrinking fast as gender inequalities become politically and socially untenable. This situation is exactly referring to the condition of women workers in Thailand.

According to Voravidh Charoenloet (1997:210-211), Thailand may have to phase out the traditional labour-intensive industries, as the country loses its competitive advantage in low labour costs to newcomers in Asia such as Vietnam, Indonesia and China. There are three strategies available to Thailand; (a) to shift labour-intensive production to the frontier to employ cheap, foreign migrant, especially Burmese labour; (b) to introduce new technology that would facilitate the production of higher quality and higher value added products; or (c) to continue the downward pressure on 'flexibility' to maintain the initial competitive advantage. At this stage of development, it would be appropriate for Thailand to upgrade its industries and skills of the labour force. (That means Thailand should opt for the second alternative in order to compete the world market). This may mean entering the realm of electronics and machinery original equipment manufacturing and becoming part of the global production network. The pressing problem of Thailand is not only the lack of technological infrastructure but also the lack of skilled labour: over 80 percent of workers in the manufacturing sector have no more than primary school education. Here we should not forget that majority of these workers are women, working in an unhealthy atmosphere. This will give more problems to the women as modern technologies are men friendly. Thus, this process will definitely give advantage to male workers only. Instead of women who are already neglected in various way as less changes of training, promotion etc. not only these, these might lead to cutting down the number of workers. If these cases come up, then first target will be unskilled women especially pregnant women, unskilled and old women.
Concluding Statement

An investigation into the economic activities of these multinationals-owned electronic companies in Southeast Asia revealed two significant findings. First, they seemed to prefer to employ more women than men workers. This deliberate policy of recruiting women is closely related to the nature of the electronic industry. The industry requires workers who can perform intricate work with diligence, patience and speed, and here women always prove to be better than men. Second, these multinational-owned establishments have earned a reputation associated with terms like “footloose industries” or “runaway electronics”. What this means is that when local conditions are no longer conducive to their interests, they can easily retrench their workers and transfer their operations to other countries which can provide them with better facilities and cheaper labour (Ariffin 1980:88).

So far, the products exported from Thailand have been based on cheap labour, which has been traditionally abundant. The private sector has tried to maintain its competitive advantage and to keep the cost of labour low by relying on the casualization of labour and by extending subcontracting into the informal sector. However, at present, the evolution of the labour force in Thailand is such that there is a trend towards the development of labour shortages. This is because Thailand’s population growth rate has declined substantially from above 3 percent per annum during the late 1950s to about 1.5 percent per annum at present. There has also been a change in the age structure of the population. Already labour shortages have been felt in some sectors and this has led to illegal immigrants. Businessmen support this because it keeps the cost of labour down so as to allow them to maintain cost-competitiveness in the international market. However, reliance on a supply of cheap labour is likely to favour the tendency of firms in Thailand to under-invest in skill development, training and technological and organizational improvements. Such a tendency is reflected in the futures of most export-oriented and high volume production processes. The common characteristics of labour-intensive industries are Tayloristic production lines, where cheap, docile and unorganized predominantly female workers are employed to perform monotonous and repetitive tasks,
involving economies of scale and the production of standardized goods for export primarily to developed countries (Charoenloet 1997: 208-209).

A conclusion is that, proportionately more women than men were given a secondary role in the labour market as evident from the seasonality of labour utilization. Second, under utilization of women power was evident. Classification of female employment by work status indicates that in spite of high participation rates, most women workers, especially in the rural areas, virtually worked at home and thus assumed double roles of gainful employment and doing domestic work (Ghosh 1990:188-189). Among those in the modern sector (professional, administrative, clerical, transportation and communication and blue collar occupations), the proportion of women in the professional and clerical classes was comparable to men’s while it was five times less than men’s in administrative occupations. The only occupation that was predominated by women is sales, the traditional sector where most of the activities were referred as informal – street sellers, petty traders, hawkers, domestic servants, construction workers, junk dealers, casual labourers, etc. That is why women are represented maximum number in the informal sectors.

Women’s educational progress is rarely reflected in increased status in business and professional fields. Despite their educational advancements, women in the highest levels of government are the exception in the country. In contrast, women have exercised increasing influence in non-governmental organizations. Though their participation in the labour force is increasing in the country, women merely account for more than 1 or 2 percent of top executive business positions. Women are well represented in the health and education professions, but most still work at the bottom levels of the status and wage hierarchy.

The expanding economy lifted the majority of Thai people out of poverty. The proportion of the population whose income was below the poverty line fell from 57 percent in 1963 to 9.3 percent in 1994 (Kakwani and Krongkaew 1996). However, the benefits of economic growth have been uneven, and there are sharp differences between the city and
the countryside, particularly between the poorest region and the capital city. In the Northeast, where one-third of the Thai population lives, 45 percent of its population was in poverty in 1975, compared to eight percent among Bangkok’s population. In 1992, the disparity remained; about one in five persons in the Northeast remained in poverty, in contrast to just one in 100 persons in Bangkok (ADB, Women and the Economy 2008: 9/5). Therefore, the development and progress which were brought by the process of globalization is bias and unequal as this is metro centric i.e. concentrated much in Bangkok city and also widen up the gender gaps in the society.

It is a general belief that globalization in Thailand has dramatically increased the number of women in paid employment but it does not always mean empowerment of Thai women in the family and society because these women workers in the multinational companies have little control over their income despite they have gone through major difficulties and discrimination in the workplace. Most of them sent their wage at home which is generally control by male members of the family.

The government of Thailand launched many programmes to improve the status of women and many of the laws are introduced in order to protect the women of the nation. However, a wide gap between theory and practice can be seen. There exists a considerable gap between the theory and practice/ reality with respect to the laws which is meant to protect the interest of the women.

Theoretically, in the process of globalization, every country is supposed to have access to the markets of every other country. Here Alwis (2000:95) opines that globalization then is based on an utopian dream. However, this utopian dream has not yet come true rather it has turned into quite a nightmare as these effects have been devastating on certain sections of society, especially the poor, the marginalized, especially women. Thailand, as a developing country where government is looking for more foreign investment is becoming an easy target for these multinational firms. In this whole process of globalization, women are the major victims despite their maximum contribution in the national income.