

Culture, Development and the Discourse on Globalization

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Global interconnectivity and interdependence does not necessarily mean cultural conformity. Culture as the core integrative force of society is hard to standardize than the economy and technology. Most of the studies relating to globalization centre around the intercourse between macro-level forces and the corresponding micro-level responses, or vice versa. However, the present paper tries to elucidate globalization both as a form and as a process by adopting the “critical” approach, and thereby bringing to the fore, the Euro-American hegemony over the existing international economic institutions.

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We are clearly living in an age characterised by an unprecedented transparency, mediation and connectivity of people, ideas, capital, technology and information, which move relentlessly across pre-existing nation states and cultural boundaries. Trans-border phenomena of various kinds like, trade and commerce, migration of people, diffusion of technology and innovation, religious conversions, political and military expansions, are not new (McNeill 1986). Now the impending interconnectedness and interdependence has an intensified spatial and temporal dimension to them, something which was lacking in the pre World War I period. This is more popularly referred to as the shrinking or the compression of time and space (Harvey 1989). But more often the central problematic of most analysis on globalization is the relationship between the macro level global forces and their respective local level responses. In fine, the scholars tend to focus more on the apparent paradox that exists between, “the homogenizing (cultural) tendencies which appear inherent to globalization” and an “increasing or even intensified heterogeneity” asserted at the local level (Meyer and Geschiere 1999; Appadurai 2000; Kalb and van der Land 2000). As result of this, reified notions of culture have found their way into the contemporary understanding of global culture, and globalization as such is assumed to be monolithic and homogenous in its content, unidirectional both in its cause and effect. But the paper on the whole tries to bring to fore the underlying “mechanisms” and “interlinkages” of globalisation when viewed as

an interfacing between culture and development in a “critical” and “dialectical” sense.

The “Deep Structure” of Contemporary Globalization

Right from the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the bringing down of the Berlin Wall, seen as an end to the Cold War, to the present day re-annexation of Crimea back into the Russian Federation, commented as the “Re-Sovietisation” and “Reverse Balkanisation”, it is the Euro-American hegemony which is shaping our lives, in many ways, even at the grass roots. Samuel Huntington in his celebrated work *The Clash of Civilizations* has laid bare the “deep structure” adopted by the western, Euro-American centric designs and devices for this purpose:

Military conflict among the Western States is unthinkable; the Western military power is unrivalled. Apart from Japan, the West faces no economic challenge. It dominates international political and security institutes and with Japan international institutions. The global political and security issues are defectively settled by a directorate of United States, Germany and Japan, all of which maintain extraordinarily close relations with each other to the exclusion of lesser and largely non-Western countries. Decisions made at the UN Security Council or in the International Monetary Fund that reflect the interests of the West are presented to the world community has become the euphemistic collective noun (“ replacing the free world”), to give global legitimacy to actions reflecting the interest of United States and other Western powers.

Thus, it is through the above stated proposition that the western powers impose their economic clout by making use of various multilateral as well as bilateral international economic forums and institutions in the way they deem appropriate.

The West is in effect using international institutions, military power and economic sanctions in the guise of democracy to run the world in the ways that will maintain Western predominance, protect Western interests, and promote Western political and economic values.

Differences in powers and struggles for military, economic and institutional power are thus one source of conflict between the Western and rest of the civilizations. Differences in culture in the form of basic values and beliefs are a second source of conflict. V.S.Naipaul has argued that Western Civilization is the “universal civilization” that “fits all men”. At the superficial level much of the Western culture has indeed permeated the rest of the world. At a more basic level, however, Western concepts differ fundamentally from those prevalent in other civilizations. Western ideas of individuation, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, rule of law, democracy, free markets, separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist, or Orthodox culture.

Western civilization is both Western and modern. Non-Western civilizations have attempted to become modern without becoming Western. To date only Japan has fully succeeded in this quest. Non-Western civilizations

will continue to acquire wealth, technology, skills, machines and weapons that are a part of being modern. They will also attempt to reconcile this modernity with their traditional culture and values. The West will increasingly have to accommodate these non-Western modern civilizations whose power approaches that of the West but whose values and interests differ significantly from those of the West. It will, however require the West to develop a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying other civilizations and the ways in which people in those civilizations see their interests. It will require an effort to identify elements of commonality between Western and other civilizations. For the relevant future there will be no universal civilization, but instead a world of different civilizations, each of which will have to learn to coexist with the other (Huntington 2000:33)

Two points are very much apparent in the above mentioned passage by Huntington, one that the word “civilization” can be used interchangeably with the word “culture” without altering its meaning, thus making it directly relevant to the central thesis of the paper. And two, the word “globalization” does not occur even once in the whole passage.

The Meaning, Role, and Content of Globalization: Are we moving towards a Uni-Cultural World?

There is no unanimity about the meaning, content, and the impact of globalization. But despite the differences among them, all the analysts are one in assigning the importance of market within the economic realms of the modern contemporary world. It is also realized that its impact depends on what happens outside of the world markets. A more contextual understanding of the world economy is invariably linked to the understanding of world society. However, it sounds more conjectural than real that such an entity as world society really exists or can exist. Frank Lechner and John Boli in the General Introduction to *The Globalization Reader* which they have edited, opine that, “the world is becoming a single place”. This is true, but from this to conclude that “different institutions function as parts of one system and distant people share a common understanding of living together on one planet” is rather far-fetched. A society may have culture of its own but there is still a doubt looming large over the constitution of world society and its culture. To them it instills among many people a budding consciousness of living in a world society. To links and institutions we therefore add culture and consciousness. Globalization is the process that fitfully brings these elements of world society together” (Lechner and Boli 2000)

But the question that still remains to be answered is how? Speaking within the purview of proper sociological and anthropological perspective, it is no society at all, because merely better technology and communication, a virtual or even a direct contact and an increasing exchange of goods and services between the differently autonomous human groupings, who otherwise have a distinct identity of their own does not make them a part of the world society. The

political agenda and cultural standards of one region namely the West, is being imposed on all other regions. This is evident from what Lechner and Boli state: "Globalization is westernization by another name. It undermines the cultural integrity of other societies and is therefore repressive, exploitative, and harmful to most people in most places (2000)."

From the yearly reports of the United Nations Development Programme-UNDP one can easily make out that the poor countries are becoming poorer in both relative and absolute terms. Therefore, it can never be claimed that the impact of globalization is always positive because of the deregulation of trade and a seemingly free market economy which will further result in an overall increase in the standard of living of all societies in the world. Bernard Cassen finds that "actually the facts tell you a very different story" (2000:14). The crux of the matter is, under globalization there is no correlation between need and investment.

All the statistics show that since the early 1990's to the present day the percentage of poor people has increased in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. Who is going to sing the praises of globalization to them? (2000: 15). As against this view, there is another group of scholars, who consider globalization to be a great emancipator of peoples,

Globalization is not inevitable. Nor does it merely reflect the march of technology. It makes for the successful spread of the economic liberalization process that began some 60 years ago in Western Europe with the Marshall Plan. It is now bringing unprecedented opportunities to billions of people across the world (quoted in Wolf 2000: 11).

More often, the scholars who back these Neoliberal Policies of the West cite the success story of the East Asian 'tiger' economies who, prior to the 1997 crises boasted of double digit growth rate. Bernard Cassen points out that these examples, in fact go against the very spirit of economic theories.

The economic prowess of South Korea, Taiwan, including the contemporary China was not founded on the economic principles enunciated by Adam Smith or David Ricardo or even that of Keynes. The comments of Cassen are noteworthy in this context, massive US governmental aid (in the interest of the cold war as in the case of Marshall Plan) in the case of South Korea and Taiwan; absolute protectionism to preserve their developing industries, managed trade (the Chinese make no secret of this); and generally speaking, and economically omnipresent state. These are the real ingredients of the much vaunted and the very real "export driven growth of these countries" (2000:15).

The consequence of unmindfully obeying the dictates of international economic institutions like that of IMF and the World Bank by the so-called East Asian "tigers" was the crisis of 1997. The present day global recession is also an example of same brand of "planted growth" driven globalization, rather than one that is guided by indigenous capital and skill base. Globalization is therefore an old story wherein the world is deemed to be shrunk, yet it can accommodate everybody. The only new thing about this old story is that it has

taken a technological turn in the past few decades. The fundamental difference is that the West believes in a kind of growth which is based on the principle of liberal humanism of the enlightenment period, while the East is too diverse and heterogeneous to be classified into one mode or one model of economic growth or globalization.

Globalization may be a new term, but is definitely an old process that can be traced back to the period of colonization. Columbus' voyages opened the door to over 450 years of European Colonialism which prepared a strong launching pad for the present day global economy and globalization. What Cecil Rhodes had commented way back in 1890's holds good even today when it comes to the understanding of the intent, meaning and purpose of globalization: We must find new lands from which we can easily obtain raw materials and at the same time exploit the cheap slave labour that is available from the natives of the colonies, who will also provide a dumping ground for the surplus goods produced in our factories.

As result of this endeavour on the part of the West, there was a rapid expansion of world trade during the colonial period. European colonial powers had literally plundered a variety of raw materials from the East.

By the 1860's and the 1870's world trade was booming. It was a 'golden era' of international trade and commerce – a period when the European powers pretty much stacked things in their favour. Wealth from their overseas colonies flooded into France, England, Holland, and Spain but some of it also flowed back into the colonies as investment into railways, roads, ports, dams and cities. Such was the extent of globalization a century ago that capital transfers from North to South were actually greater at the end of 1890's than at the end of 1990's. By 1913 exports (hallmark of increasing economic integration) accounted for a larger share of global production than they did in 1999 (Ellwood 2001:14).

Bretton Woods Conference and the Structuring of New Economic World Order

In July 1944, even when the World War II had not officially ended, a Financial and Monetary Conference was held at Bretton Woods village in New Hampshire, US in which delegates from 44 nations took part. It had twin aims,

- i) To finance the rebuilding of Europe after the devastation of the II World War.
- ii) To prepare a new framework for the post war global economy and save the world from future economic depressions.

John Maynard Keynes, one of the eminent economists of twentieth century pointed out that the global economic depression of 1930 was because of the lack of sufficient aggregate demand. Therefore governmental intervention was necessary in creating the aggregate demand, either by increasing fiscal expenditure or reducing taxes. At the Conference his proposal to establish a world "reserve currency" to be administered by a Central Bank was not accepted. His rationale was, such a bank would create a more stable and

egalitarian world economy as it would have automatically recycled the trade surpluses to the finance deficit regions of the world. But this was not allowed and the American Dollar was accepted as the international currency, a glaring example of how US wanted to assert its position rather than that of the whole world.

As the Chairman of Clinton's Council of Economic Advisers Stiglitz says he tried to, forge an economic policy and philosophy that viewed the relationship between governments and markets as complimentary, both working in partnership and recognized that while markets are the centre of the economy, there was an important if limited role for governments to play. I had studied the failures of both markets and governments and was not so naive as to think that government could remedy every market failure. Neither was so foolish as to believe that markets by themselves solved every social and cultural problem. Inequalities, unemployment, environmental concerns: these were all issues in which government had to take an important role. I had worked on the initiative for "reinventing government" – making government more efficient and more responsive; I had seen where government was neither; I had seen how difficult the reform is, but I had also seen that improvements modest as they might be were possible (Stiglitz 2002).

Globalization as an Entanglement of Culture and Economic Development

The predicament of globalization is as much academic as it is real. One single scientific method was supposed to produce objective, undistorted and universally valid knowledge of any kind. But more recently, many critics of this method connect these above stated position to a complex western ideology called as *Modernism*. *Modernism* was seen as liberation from outdated traditions that prevent people from building better life for themselves and for their children. However, it was argued that modernism was in itself a culture bound enterprise with its own definition of "development". These were further used by the powerful Western states to dominate and undermine the beliefs and traditional practices of the non-Western societies (Agar 1996; Behar 1997; Bernard 1994; Bradburd 1998).

With most of the Asian, African and Latin American Countries becoming politically independent from the colonial rule in the latter half of the 20th century, there were new hopes and aspirations for the eradication of poverty by increasing the quality of life. Large-scale developmental plans were undertaken for the socio-economic welfare of the masses, as culture and traditionally rooted belief structures was seen as major stumbling block for the developmental process. Soon development became a popular paradigm among the planners, policymakers and academicians. In the wake of achieving the preset developmental objectives the governments of these countries started adopting a policy which is popularly referred to as LPG – Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization. These policies had least impact on the lives of the people as they hardly took into account their local needs and showed no concern for their participation in the overall developmental process. However,

we also need to take into account the antecedents of globalization as a process. From where does it emanate and how does it shape and gets shaped by the existing cultural contexts? Speaking from a macro level globalization is *not* a monolithic entity. As development becomes increasingly globalized across different cultures, the researchers cannot assume that this process is singular and one way in both its cause and effect, despite the fact that the initial thrust came from the west during the colonial and post colonial periods. Ginsberg and Rapp have cautioned against adopting unidirectional models of the relationship between indigenous perceptions of culture and globalization observing that,

While our work calls attention to the impact of global processes on everyday local experiences, it does not assume that power to define development is not unidirectional. People everywhere actively use their local cultural logics and social relations to incorporate, revise or resist the influence of seemingly distant political economic forces (Ginsberg and Rapp 1995: 1)

Even if we assume that globalization has been successful in creating a unitary as well egalitarian international economic system accessible to all people across the globe, then why is gap between the rich and poor widening day by day? When we take the example of a developing country like India, globalization has only exacerbated the already existing social problems of the people, especially at the grass root levels. *Modernity* as an agenda of globalization has inflicted unforeseen pains and miseries on the part of these people, as they are caught in between a complete lack of gainful employment and economic impoverishment on one side, and the abrupt breaking down of the indigenous cultural adaptive mechanisms which served as support system for ages, on the other.

With the advent of large-scale industrialization, mechanization of traditional agricultural practices, commercialization of food production and the subsequent shift towards a globalized monetary economy, the delicate balance that the people shared with their culture is in jeopardy. The fast dwindling forest cover due to large-scale mining and the spread of industries in the agricultural fields has brought about an abrupt shift in their occupation patterns. The sources of the livelihood are fast vanishing and this is acting as a demographic squeeze on the populations which survives on subsistent economy. These developments have finally forced people at the grass roots to move out of their traditional set up in search of sustainable livelihood. The social organization that held together the family, economy, religion and economy, is itself undergoing fragmentation. Modern education system is taking away people from their work force. They think that if they become educated, they will neither get jobs as they have to compete with the people of mainstream, nor will they be able learn the indigenous skills that could help them to earn their livelihood because of the fast depleting natural resources which once used to be their main stay.

This also drives home the fact that, there has always been a severe dearth of importance laid on “non economic” and specifically “cultural” dimensions in the study of development as goal of globalization. The idea is

that there needs to be a paradigm shift in our current discourse on globalization. As Dreze and Sen (1998:2) aptly put it, “there must be an attempt to link the strategies of development to something more fundamental (culture), in particular, the ends of economic and social development..... It is only with an explicit recognition of the basic ends that debates on means and strategies can be adequately founded”

While preparing the human development indicators, we go much beyond scope of market forces like that of demand and supply. Therefore the recent trend is to define human development which ultimately aims at “enlarging people’s choices” (UNDP: HDR III). On the one hand we say that, “more conventional criteria of economic success, like that of high growth rate, a sound balance of payment, and so on are to be valued only as means to deeper ends” (Dreze and Sen 1998). This means that the end of any developmental process is people themselves as bearers of culture. Thus, when we talk of ends we generally mean the deeper cultural roots of the people, “increase in creativity and decline in entropy or extent of criminality, which is possible only when a holistic and symbiotic process (culture) of social transformation could be ensured” (Kashyap 1998:30).

Development process of any kind, globalization included, essentially is made up of two aspects, viz. the instrumental or the economic value expressive or cultural value. If we put emphasis only on the instrumental value, the ‘real’ development, cultural part which gives ‘meaning’ to development, remains hidden. Therefore, the drawback of instrumental approach adopted by most of the proponents of globalization does not account for the variations within or inside a policy framework, a nation-state or a region of the so called global economy.

Conclusion

As the preceding discussion illustrates, the forces of globalization have little respect for the kinds of social, cultural, religious, political, and geographical boundaries that are used to standardize and routinize contacts between vastly different categories of ideas, capital, technology, images, practices, and peoples. The distinctiveness of culture can be ascertained or gauged only through its functional integration. It is not possible to understand any particular aspect of culture, including that of economy or technology, torn apart from its context or milieu. Under these circumstances, if certain aspects or traits of the Western countries cross over non-Western developing nation like India, via the so called process of globalization, it does not give rise to a global culture of any kind.

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