
Globalisation – The Normative and The Reality

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The world that we live in today is a globalised world, much different from what it was atleast twenty years back -and the 'Era of globalisation' is fast becoming the preferred term for describing current times. The phenomenon of globalisation puts different societies and cultures in much greater direct contact with one another. It connects people to people much faster than people and culture can often prepare themselves. With advances in technology and communication, the world becomes de-territorialized, the constraints of geography shrink and the world becomes more singular and unified.

Sociologist Roland Robertson defines globalisation as “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole”. Anthony Giddens argues that technological evolution has resulted in a universalisation and liberalisation of time and space, which he considers prerequisites for globalisation in an age of post modernity. He argues that globalising dimensions of interactions create 'stretched' relationship between 'local' and 'distant' media forms, with local happenings being for instance, shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.

Globalisation is the current buzzword for the 'shrinking' of our planet. Some historians of the 21st century consider the crumbling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 – the symbol of the break- up of the Soviet empire – a milestone along the road to globalisation. The most widely recognised symbol of the globalisation system is the World Wide

Web, which unites everyone. The term 'globalisation' is also used to denote ' global economic integration', which despite all its problems, contradictions and criticism, now appears to be inevitable, built as it is on the backs of an irreversible 'technological globalisation process' and an integrated global communications systems (the WWW mentioned earlier + Satellite communication).

Globalisation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is a result of capitalist expansion, entailing the integration of all economic activity (local, national and regional) into a 'global' market place : that is a market place that transcends geo-political borders and is not subject to regulation by nation states. The practical manifestations of this integration are the dismantling of national barriers to external trade and finance, deregulation of the economy, export-driven economic growth, removal of controls on the transnational mobility of finance and the restructuring of local and national economies to facilitate free-market capitalism. These are undoubtedly vital economic dimensions of globalisation but its cultural and social dimensions are nonetheless equally important and certainly very interesting area for analysis and introspection.

The breaking up of space and time brought about by electronic media has enabled individuals to interact with one another and within frameworks of mediated interaction regardless of special disparities. The internet and the various activities in which people are involved when using it have fundamentally changed the meaning of temporal differences and their implications for physical mobility. Contacts between distant locations can take place on the internet at the same time. Internet activities, such as e-mail alter the dimensions of time in work and in social interaction releasing rigid time-patterns in the organization of work and other everyday life activities. Therefore, what we can observe is that while globalization has many facets – economic, political and cultural – it is cultural globalisation that

occurs through the media and as a result of this scholars like Robertson talk of a global culture and 'global, consciousness'. Martin Albrow moves further arguing that globalisation results in a 'world society'. He defines globalisation as "all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society. It is true that globalisation connects the global and the local through a number of politico-economic, technological structures. The notion of a single global society implies homogenisation where cultural elements from all over the world combine to form a single, harmonious common world culture. But is cultural homogenisation really taking place? When we look at the deeper dimensions of the process of globalisation, this professed connectivity / integration / unification of the local and the global is a camouflage for the inegalitarian, hegemonic politico-economic global order, transgressing the borders of honourable identity, dignity and autonomy of the people and the nation states, that are on the periphery of the global order. The neo-liberal march towards growth, abundance and development has not been able to abate poverty, inequity, and injustice either within the nation states or at the global level. The process is more a hegemonic process than a homogenised one which is more akin to a monoculture with respect to almost every aspect of an individual's way of life. The idea that each culture possesses its own wisdom and characteristics, its own novelty and uniqueness, born of its own individual struggle over thousands of years to cope with nature and circumstance, has been drowned out by the hue and cry that the world is now one, that the Western model – neoliberal markets, democracy and the rest is tempting one and all. This is nothing, but a very conscious and subtle way of dominating the developing world by the developed world. Sneakers, blue jeans, burgers, KFC, Hollywood blockbusters – Cultural icons of our times? Or is it Cultural Imperialism? This can really be best understood as

Cultural Imperialism or domination of one single culture trampling over the rest of the cultures of the world. And this One single culture is that of the West or more specifically we can call it a phenomenon called 'Americanisation' where cultural objects like food, music, clothes, dance, language, pronunciation of the developing nations are undergoing wild and rapid changes to become “American”.

At this juncture, we must remember that gone are the days of geographic imperialism or colonialism. Crude political domination has been replaced by a new form of capitalist subjugation of the developing countries. If we, for instance, take the case of a developing country like India, what one can witness is that Westward – looking liberalisation and explosive scale of globalisation of 1990s have converted India into a typical industry society – steeped in crass materialism and illusory prosperity – which is socially insensitive and highly selfish. Urban Indian youth tends to emulate the American way of life as they consider it to be much more “superior” than what they have.

Ever since the time India opted to go global, sweeping socio-economical, political and technological changes have moulded the face of India. As for India, globalisation has become a buzz word after 1991 and day by day this buzzing is getting louder. It has touched all the domains of Indian life and experience. Globalisation is no longer a theoretical concept; it is a glaring reality; impinging upon almost every aspect of human existence. The fast growing cities and the overall urbanization that we have been witnessing across India are the direct effect of globalization. The day-to-day experience, demands of the time, challenges posed by it, personal hopes, aspirations and dreams in urban India have almost metamorphosed. The young generation possesses a sense of competition and at the same time they are quite ambitions and wants to do everything that is possible to climb up the career ladder as

higher as possible. Growing awareness of technology and the use of it have definitely exposed India to a new environment. This change has come about due to strong wish of youths to participate in the technological revolution that is going on all around the world.

Along with being competitive, ambitious and techno-savvy, the generation is trendy as well. The global trend has not left the society untouched. Due to free incoming of values, costumes, dresses and the living habits of Western World, the basis of Indian Culture has been greatly influenced. With the ever growing global scene, among various offshoots of globalization, consumerism came out as one of the major sprawling things. It is a kind of a craze to get hold of things when you do not even need them. Americans' insatiable urge to acquire things, whether or not they are necessary has indeed reached epidemic proportions. Actually one of the ways in which capitalism thrives is by constantly generating 'needs' among people, While some needs are legitimate, others are not. Consumerism has permeated and changed the fabric of contemporary Indian Society. Western fashions are coming to India. The traditional Indian dress is increasingly being displaced by Western dresses especially in urban areas. To promote this consumerist behavior, advertisement agencies play a very crucial role not only in shaping up people's choice behaviour but also in forming their mindset and outlook to life. Advertisements showing a couple all smiles because they had just bought a toothbrush ; a group of friends giggling over their mobile phones ; a family happily feeding their kid junk food ; a young graduate jumping with joy clutching a credit card ; a girl holding seven shopping bags and beaming , have one thing in common :- “Everyone looked incredibly happy”. Shopping has become the most preferred activity of the urban Indians. Impulsive shopping, Internet shopping, shopping to amuse oneself are now part of the core cultural value of the mainstream Indians. The mall Culture has enslaved our urban

citizenry to crass consumerism. Consumption rather than production has become the major force of social change in India today. Today there is a perceptible shift towards a 'buying culture' with more and more stress on commodity consumption in urban and semi-urban areas. Even in rural India, the ethos of consumerism has reached an all-time high, in spite of the fact that a large segment of our population belongs to marginalized and backward sections.

Thus one cannot deny the fact in today's world that every individual is affected by the phenomenon of globalisation in one way or another. It is true that something profound is happening, that the world is changing, that a new world of economic, political and cultural order is emerging. These changes affect people's identities and cultural values which sometimes gets altered significantly. Whether it is between generations or intra-personally, new values cause dissonance and conflict with existing deeper-rooted values. Sometimes such transitions and changes can further cause difficulty with internal growth and development.

With growing urban mindset, a grossly compromising attitude is seen to be sipping in human behavior. When we take the case of India, we all should be proud that she is developing and trying to emerge as a major world power to be reckoned with, but what she ignores in the recent years is the case of erosion of 'Values' from our society. As a result of excessive emphasis on cut-throat competition for maximum acquisition of materialistic benefits, many cherished values of life are getting fast eroded - Value of Contentment, Value of Cooperation, Value of Self-restraint in Consumerism, Value of unbiasedness, Value of independence in thinking, Value of providing ideal leadership, Value of knowledge and Commitment as prime movers of action, the Value of duties as against right are all getting eroded in the highly materialistic paradigm of development and structural changes that are taking place around us with immense

speed and complexity. Cultures in developing countries are under siege from the forces of global economic integration which is controlled by the developed world. Today's flow of culture is unbalanced, heavily weighted in one direction, from developed world to developing world. It is true that people's lives are being linked more deeply, intensely and immediately than ever before as distance, time and borders diminish. But the unevenness of globalization and open markets are contributing to cultural insecurity in developing nations like ours, and neglecting community, custom and tradition that has prevailed for centuries.

The globalization in practice today has actually got transformed into a form of neo-colonialism – a domination of western socio-cultural traits, a digression from the normative concept of globalisation.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “I do not want any house to be walled in on all sides and any windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about any house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any one of them.” It would be worthwhile at this point to remember Swami Vivekananda while trying to understand the real sense of the term globalization. Vivekananda well over hundred years back has expressed his idea of the real globalization as the emergence of a new society and culture which would be a synthesis of the best of the East and of the West. Globalisation should enlighten by exposing us to diverse cultures but at the same time it should not allow any particular to dominate or wipe out somebody's own culture. What is needed is a globalization that promotes cultural plurality, homogeneity and tolerance to diversity – this is true globalization.

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