

Globalization and Cultural Transformation: Concept and Perspectives

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Abstract

The era of post modernism has seen many expressions of globalization. It has been reflected in the many domains of the society i.e. the societal processes, social relationships, social structures or in cultural artifacts. It is a Trans- planetary process that is often reciprocated with the term Trans- nationalism. Globalization often results in more liquidity and easier flow of cross cultural barriers in comparison to the other equivalent processes like liberalization or privatization.. Globalization in the recent world has been seen as a proliferation of consumerist Western culture and a global icon of cultural commoditization. But the process not only brings dynamic cultural changes in regard of Homogenization but also have many other facets like differentialism or Convergence of culture etc. The present paper tries to decipher the different concepts and perspectives related to Cultural Globalization and its impacts in the contemporary world.

Key Words: *Globalization, Culture, Homogenization, Differentialism, Convergence*

Globalization may be thought initially as the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual- (Held et. al. 1999:2). Globalization today is pervading the world. It is present in all dimensions of the society whether it is economical, political, historical or cultural. The process of globalization may be analysed in a two major types i.e. globalization as a structural process and globalization as a cultural process (Singh 2004, 2007). As a structural process, globalization stratifies the social structures, economic and legal institutions, religious structures, educational and media institutions etc. The primary aim of the paper is to understand the cultural dimension of the globalization as a cultural process.

Globalization as a Cultural Process

Culture has always been portrayed as a mirror of human society, their thinking and values and their habits through different methods and technology. Culture refers to the characterization of a particular region, people, their lifestyles and habits. It is the study of both material and non-material elements of the society. It focuses on the customs, their norms and values and other societal behaviors. While material culture visualizes the culture i.e. physically embedded elements

like the patterns of consumption, artifacts and other substantial properties; however, non-material culture is the expression of ideas, values, norms etc.

From the prospect of globalization, culture is the cultivation of intricate social actions that occurs globally. It concentrates on the integration, convergence and diffusion of the cultural traits. Globalization has been visualized as an infrastructure of cultural production, cultural transmission and cultural reception. As the flow of culture is tend to be easier so the nature of cultural change is also said to be dynamic. According to Nederveen Pieterse (2004) the cultural globalization is dominated by three views: *Cultural Convergence*, *Cultural differentialism* and *cultural hybridization*. While the concept of cultural differentialism is given by 'Samuel Huntington' in his paper 'Clash of Civilizations' (1996), which refers that whenever cultures come in contact to each other due to differences of their views there happens a clash whereas the concept of 'cultural convergence' given by George Ritzer (1993) was focused on globalization or 'modernization' of culture. It was the westernization of different cultures which was occurring due to new communication technologies. The third concept of 'cultural hybridization' refers to ongoing mixing of cultures. The hybridity is caused by new media like internet, mobile phones due to which two different cultures come into each other's contact with much faster rate crossing the borders of time and space. So, the hybridity reflected on different aspects of life like food, culture, music, dance, clothing etc. or it can be said that westernization of society is taking place.

The processes of cultural flow can be further explained broadly in terms of a number of interrelated concepts such as cultural convergence, cultural imperialism, Americanization or McDonaldization, expansionism, cultural differentialism, pluralism and traditionalism, cultural hybridization, and creolization. These concepts need to be explained briefly.

Cultural Convergence

The concept of cultural convergence can also be described as the process of cultural homogenization. It emphasizes on increasing sameness or a homogenized nature of world culture. The major supporter of this notion are 'hyper-globalizers' who think that the world today has crossed all the barriers of nation states and are eventually converted into a global village. The notion believes that the part of the society that is more dominant subdues upon the others and as a result a process of assimilation of world cultures is taking place. Factors that primarily results in occurrence of the above process are:

Cultural Imperialism

Ritzer (2011:163) describes, "Cultural Imperialism indicates that one or more cultures are imposing themselves, more or less consciously, on other cultures thereby destroying local culture, in whole, or more likely in part." In the process of convergence the *Imperialism* always plays an important role. It fuels the destruction of local cultures and gives rise to one single capitalist market. For instance, with industrial revolution the evolution of ideologies like Westernization discovered many new technologies that were very efficient and time saving in nature. So, the small scale industries like handloom or traditional craft industries started seeing many adverse effect of it both in terms of labor and capital especially due to mass manufactured goods by machines. Cultural imperialism not only affects economically but also threatens the skills and cultural diversity.

Americanization or McDonaldization

The concept of *Americanization* or *McDonaldization* was first given by George Ritzer in 'The McDonaldization Thesis' (1997, 2008). The world in recent times has experienced the growth of capitalist culture like *Americanization* or *McDonaldization*. In this culture, the homogenization process is taking place in the form of fast food restaurants. The reason behind the spread of such consumerist culture is their profit making perspective. Another factor that has outlined their expansion is the use of improved technologies due to which they are relatively more time saving and efficient,

calculable both in terms of quality and quantity. Being capitally stronger than others they by nature overpower the market and also accomplished to impose themselves on the other cultural realms.

Expansionalism

The concept of expansionalism is the extended process of the cultural imperialism and McDonaldization. Whether in terms of fast food, restaurants, drugs that are globally distributed, clothing and fashion stores all go through the process of expansionalism. The primary goal of all of these aforementioned goods and services are based on profit maximization. So they try to expand their market as much as possible beyond the boundaries of a single territory and especially to the third world countries. The key reason for this is the lack of science and technology in comparison to developed countries. Hence, this results in homogenized culture of market throughout the world.

Besides, scholars like Mayer et al. (1997) believe 'Isomorphism' or 'world culture theory' i.e. single or uniform globe model is reason behind the cultural convergence. The world is highly going towards rationalism and is adopting same nature of economic, ideological and educational systems throughout. The success of United Nations is one such example. Thus, it can be argued that global homogeneity has been spread in all dimensions of the society like education, health (like drugs), business etc.

Cultural Differentialism

Huntington (1993) in his paper states about the world situation especially till the end of cold war. He argued the different cultural views as the main reason behind cold war as every cultural region tries to overwhelm its values upon others and as a result a clash starts among the civilizations. The world thus remains unaffected by the process of multi or Trans culturalism and maintains their individual cultural ideologies. The major factors behind the differentialism process can be divided as pluralism and traditionalism

Pluralism

The concept of pluralism describes the pluralistic nature of cultural behavior. The difference can be seen both in material and non- material culture. In India, for example the youths on their regular or daily life prefers to wear Western attires but the same youth during a marriage ceremony or in festivals love to wear peculiar traditional attires. Same in the case of non- material culture like People during festivals like to enjoy with other religions comfortably. Many Hindus go to a Muslim House during Eid or enjoy Christmas at their house with cakes, candles and other decorative items but the same person changes the mind when marrying in other cultural groups or they prefer to marry within the same caste. It shows a dualism or clash in the thought process that further encourages cultural differentialism.

Traditionalism

The process of Traditionalism is a contributing factor in differentialism as it tries to empower own tradition from other contemporary traditions. At greater level, it is a clash between two different religions like the missionaries trying to convert people in colonial period or such religion based struggle. At smaller level, it is a clash within a single sect of religion like the emergence of Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj from Hindu fold. These sects have though emerged from Hinduism still their norms and belief systems are very much different from typical Sanatan sect. The societies from historical times till today have always come across such differentialism that has been further divided into three phases:

Phase I: It was the historical period till 1500 A.D. The whole world has their own cultural and religious ideologies. It was a clash of thought among Hinduism, Islamic, Chinese, Japanese, Christianity and all other individual religions.

Phase II: This phase describes the time period of 1500 A.D to 1900 A.D. It was the time when Western ideology was proliferating. The notions like colonization, imperialization etc. was in

existence. Even the discoveries in the field of science and technology were also changing the viewpoints of the culture.

Phase III: It was the most important phase as it covers the time period after 1900 A.D. This period characterizes of emergence of most of the ideologies like capitalism, communism, liberalism etc. It was a period when the clash was not only with other civilizations but also among same cultures. Some of the scholars deny this notion of differentialism as they believe it is based upon assumptions and have no social reality. But, it is also affirmed that the differentialism among the cultures will exist till the ideologies exist. Globalization as a homogenous process can slow down its impacts but the difference can't be merged fully.

Cultural Hybridization

It is the ongoing mixing of cultures that emphasizes heterogenization of cultures globally. It states that one culture can't be fully homogenized into a single culture rather some elements of both mixes up when two different cultures come into contact. Thus it creates a nature of hybridization among the specific cultures and adds new cultural aspects on that. The process of hybridization is most common and rapid in the globalization of culture. For example: in music industry when the aspect of American music came into contact with traditional West African Rapping, it took a new form known as Hip hop music. And the most striking feature of it was this type of music was free from any kind of rigid forms of music and was actually stories delivered through spoken words. Thereby it was easier to understand and sing, and got popularized among the general population in America very quickly. The other forms in which cultural hybridization is taking place are glocalization and creolization.

Glocalization

Cvetkovich and Kellner (1997) define Glocalization as "the mixing of cultures as a result of Globalization and the production, out of the integration of the global and the local." In this process due to the mixing of global elements, the local culture gets hybridized or contaminates some alien components in the native culture. It doesn't overpower any specific culture but adds on to the basic culture and forms a new and positive outlook in the heterogenization of the society. New cultural and social realities get innovate that are more rational still attractive in nature.

Creolization

Ritzer (2011) describes, "Creolization involves a combination of languages and cultures that were previously unintelligible to one another." The concept can be found in many instances of the society. Like Many East Indians live in South American countries of West Indies, Trinidad and other Caribbean Regions. The demographic and historical coexistence between Africans and East Indians there has given rise of a process of *Interculturation* especially in Trinidad. The term Interculturation can be used to demonstrate the coexistence between two cultures and their interrelation. It has given rise to the *Creole language* which refers to a natural language that has been developed from a mixture of different language at a sudden point of time or it can be refer as a kind of Hybrid language. Even it has been noticed that due to this contamination the East Indians who initially followed caste system have gradually transformed themselves with Racist system of ideology. This ideology of this interculturalization is purely based on colors. While the Africans are manifested as black one the East Indians are showed as *White masked*. The full scenario can be told as *Caste having passed into Race*.

Arjun Appadurai's concept of *Landscapes* (1996) describes the measures through which Cultural Hybridization takes place. He states about five kind of Global flows of culture in this sense i.e. '*Ethnoscape* or Global movement of mobile groups or individuals', '*Technoscapes* or Global flow of technology', '*Financescape* or Global flow of sums', '*Mediascape* or Global flow of information',

and 'Ideoscape or Global flow of ideologies'. Due to these cultural flows the natures of existing cultural or societal behaviors change to more or less extent.

Thus the contamination of cultures always results in production of new cultural and social prospects of the society and the rapid process of Globalization with liberalized norms has fuelled its growth immensely. Besides, the modernization of the society has also formed a new cultural system i.e. Cyber Culture or the Virtual Culture:

The rise of communication technologies have lessened the face to face interaction of people and the youth especially are leaning their interest from existing culture to a new virtual world of Cyber Culture. They have their own process of thought and belief that are formed through interaction with people from numerous cultural regions and within a second. They are becoming more rationalized about their value system. It is creating new forms of cultural system and ideologies and is expanding the "Time-Space Compression" (Harvey, 1989).

Globalization and Cultural Transformations in Indian Context

India is a country that has been known for its religious and cultural values since the ages. The country on one hand characterizes *Unity in Diversity* or the concept of Homogenization and on the other hand it has ideologies based on heterogeneous notions varying from secularist to nationalist, from pluralistic to orthodox etc. The process of Globalization that has proliferated change in the country are quite visible in all of its cultural aspects i.e. both in material and non- material culture.

Material Culture

Material culture is highly dynamic in nature. It is very flexible in nature and can spread at a much faster rate than non- material culture. For example, food habits, dressing habits, handicrafts etc. can be adapted from one culture to another at a quick and simple way. Their form changes neither only among other cultures but also in a single culture at different levels. The type of food people eat or dress people carry at a particular homogenous area can be heterogeneous. For Example: In India, the preference of consumption of goods can be divided into four major levels:

1. Global Level: It is found throughout the globe like McDonald, Dominos, US PIZZA, Burger King, KFC, Levis, UCB, Nike etc.
2. National Level: It has its market at national level. Britannia, Nestle, Haldirams, Bikaner, Parle, Café Coffee Day, Manyavar, Khadi, Reliance Trends, Big Bazaar etc. demonstrates this level.
3. Regional Level: These kinds of hubs are found mainly at regional level or state level and are in the process to expansion of their market at national level. For instance, Sagar Ratna that started in the parts of Northern India but is extending its franchise to all over the country slowly. The same goes with Mr. Idli that was actually a South Indian Group of companies but gradually expanding its territory to North Indians states and has set up many outlets in the National Capital Territory, New Delhi.
4. Local Level: This refers to all the local level markets that are famous or doing best at their local or specific area i.e. to a single district or may be in two. They are smaller in size in comparison to the others but have ample opportunity for growth, thus contributes in the process of Cultural Globalization.

In the field of Infrastructural services too this levels can be identified. For example: OYO, Goibibo, MakeMyTrip etc. are contributing in the Globalization of Tourism. All these stages of Globalization are transforming the cultural aspects of the society. Though the Globalization of material culture mostly helps in Cultural Homogenization, still sometimes when they mix up an elegant form of Cultural Hybridization also takes place like the Fusion or Indo-Western Dress culture. Sometimes, with the development of manufacturers like Manyavar, Sabhyata that excels in

designing Indian Traditional wears or use of eco friendly goods like Bamboo products, Bell- Metal etc. are also contributing in the Glocalization of Indian market at the world level.

Non- Material Culture

Non- material culture are those culture that can't be feel or touch physically but are a part and parcel of our value system and norm based culture. For example: marriages, language, music, worshipping systems etc. They are primarily intangible in nature and are rigid in comparison to material culture. They mainly reflect Cultural Differentialism as there is dissimilarity among the value systems of the society. With the spread of Globalization though changes have took place to some extent, still the basic element of a culture i.e. the norms, values can't be change altogether. For Instance: In India though inter-caste marriages are occurring in some places but till now they prefer to marry within the same caste. In the same manner, though English has been accepted as a universal language, still people prefer their own mother tongue while communicating at individual level throughout the world. Exceptional to this is the case of music. As music is free from all kind of norms and values and are acceptable to the society at a whole, so it is feasible to change. Like Jazz and Indi Pop style of music that is basically a fusion of Indian and Western style of music, but are popularized as they are not rigid like traditional Indian Ragas and can be easily understood. They symbolize the growth of popular culture and impact of Cultural Hybridization in the contemporary world.

Conclusion

The elements of culture are omnipresent and multi structured. It is a dynamic phenomenon that changes with time and space. The aspects that were important few years back are not important today or may have changed its forms. This concept of 'Cultural Lag'(Ogburn, 1964) is a static event that ensures the changes in the societal processes. In the colonial period while the cultural dimensions were based upon the terminologies like black and oriental, the modern society is perhaps less conscious about them and is more focused on the processes of Differentialism, Homogenization, and Hybridization. With the digitalization of the society the process of Globalization has fuelled and people become more interactive about one another. They can access into the lives of both individual and community with the same ease. All these occurrences help in knowing the cultural insights of a society better and influence others with individual opinions. Sometimes, the aspects of a particular culture attract others and at other times the native cultural elements are imposed on an alien culture and in this process, the cultural transformations go on. At times people are bothered of their ethnicity and nationality whereas on some occasions they become rational and accept the values of other cultural backgrounds. This coherence is very necessary to maintain structure of the pluralistic society. Thus, the current transformations of culture is happening due to Globalization and its liquid nature of interactivity and it is also changing the dimensions of modern culture with the process of Differentialism, Homogenization and Hybridization especially through digitalization.

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