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Conceptualizing Globalization in the Context of the Diversified Cultural Dimensions of North-East Indian States

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Abstract: Bringing together all the countries of the world economically, politically, socially and culturally *under one single umbrella is the phenomena called Globalization. At present, every country is, in one way or another, linked with other countries through Globalization. The reach of the Globalization is limited not only to internation level but in a country itself and its many states and regions are equally impacted by the ever-present trend of Globalization. India's North East Region bears a very significant and unique place in India's socioeconomic and geopolitical map with its diverse ethnicity and culture. The impact of Globalization has a tremendous effect on the region. The present paper is aimed towards the detail analysis of the effects, positive or negative, of the Globalization.*

Keywords: Ethnicity, Globalization, Geopolitics, Identity, North-East India etc.

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Introduction

Globalization, which entails privatization and liberalization, has become the buzzword today. It is the dominant ideology by which the socio-economic policies and programmes of most of the countries are organized and structured. This is particularly so, after the end of the cold war, the dismantling of state socialism in the USSR and the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The present era of globalization has certain distinct features like new markets, new tools (Internet links, cellular

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phones, and media networks), new actors (MNCs, WTO), the global networks of NGOs and new rules (multilateral agreements on trade, services and intellectual property rights. ECD defined globalization as "the wide set of processes and relationships as a result of which previously fairly separate economies have become increasingly inter-related to an unprecedently high degree." The term has often been identified with economic reforms, Structural Adjustment Programme, new world trade order, opening up of domestic markets and global communication village. Privatization, deregulation and trans-nationalization of capital are the three important corollaries of globalization. The Govt. of India adopted New Economy Policy in 1991, which calls for an assessment of the role of the state, liberalization of trade, structural adjustment, transparency and full convertibility of Rupee. The restructuring of economy envisaged by IMF involves the replacement of import substitution growth strategy by an export-oriented growth Strategy. The MNCs, Foreign Direct Investors and Foreign Institutional Investors play vital role in bringing the whole country under market system. As a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, globalization is considered by some as a form of capitalist expansion which entails the integration of local and national economies into a global, unregulated market economy.

Globalization is a multidimensional concept. It has political, economic and cultural manifestations, and these must be adequately distinguished. It is wrong to assume that globalization has purely economic dimensions, just as it would also be mistaken to assume that it is a purely cultural phenomenon. The impact of globalization is vastly uneven — it affects some societies more than others and some parts of some societies more than others — and it is important to avoid drawing general conclusions about the impact of globalization without paying sufficient attention to specific contexts. Globalization is a term in heavy current usage but one whose meaning remains diverse, often even among those who invoke it. Indeed, Jan Aart Scholte states that "globalization stands out for quite a large public spread across the world as one of the defining terms of late twentieth century social consciousness.". The term is often distinguished more by what it is not, rather than what it is.

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Globalization and the North East India

The economies of the world have developed unevenly, historically, such that entire geographical regions were left mired in poverty and disease while others began to reduce poverty and disease on a wholesale basis. The presence of diverse communities and tribal populations, each characterized by their unique customs and traditional culture, is a prominent characteristic of Northeast India. The lifestyle in the Northeast, particularly among its indigenous groups, diverges significantly from other ways of living. They possess distinct dietary preferences, engage in diverse occupations, and uphold separate cultural practices. Globalization exerts a significant influence on all aspects of life in the Northeast. The most important characteristic of the North-Eastern part of India is that tribal community dominates the area. All the states in the region share fragile international border. Consequently, both product and factor markets in these states have some significant international dimension. In this area, more than fifty years since independence and despite the emergence of independent statehood and identity. State sponsored industrialization has failed to take off in the region. In the post liberalized scenario, the mismatch between private and public investments is all the more pronounced with lack of regulatory controls to achieve socially desirable investments, particularly in the Nort Eastern states. Insurgency, political uncertainty and lack of effective governance have created a situation whereby the stepmotherly treatment of the North East has made radical changes impossible to conceive, leave alone to implement them. Much of the resource mobilization is non-existent and leading to an erosion of competition advantage for the region to gain control over their developmental agenda. There is a decline in the reinvestment of private and public resources and a considerable conflict of private capital from the area is reality, thereby leading to unsustainable growth regimes. Given the socioeconomic and geopolitical dimensions in the region, the prevailing pattern of development in these states has also culminated in the form of social unrest and degradation of economic values. This clearly implies that the development policies and programmes have failed short of meeting the social and economic aspirations of the indigenous population in the region. In this context, the question that arises is how the forces of Globalization and economic growth could be combined

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together to address the implicit and most relevant questions associated with migration, unemployment and development of trading activities in the perspective of North-Eastern Region of India.

Prior to the advent of concurrent phase of globalization, the geographical entity termed as North East has been marked by distinct phases of development with accompanying power structures. This process in itself may not seem to be much different from other areas of India's mainland but the short time frame within which the phases elapsed is certainly noteworthy. One may differ in terms of the terminologies related to each phase such as pre-colonial civilization, colonial or imperial and post-colonial/ liberal constitutional, post-modern/ post-structural etc. but there are broader agreements regarding the characteristics that marked these phases of development and state formation. We will try to highlight the salient features of each phase and try to collate them with the contemporary phase. If one paints the pre-colonial phase of this region with one brush then certain broad traits emerge which seem to be an inseparable part of this era. It was a relatively closed system, which was primordial in nature bounded by clan/ kinship boundaries rather than territorial ones. The economy was subsistence based and political structures were self-contained. But with the passage of time the economy of surplus emerged in the valleys giving rise to greater political structures. The dichotomy between the wetlands/valleys and the usufruct/highlands became apparent thereafter with the interplay of other related factors. It is observed that the wetlands in the valleys generated surplus which created dominant ruling clans who tried to subjugate the hills where due to shifting cultivation, generation of surplus (at the scale of the wetlands) was not possible. But the dominant clans in the wetlands maintained only a notional control over the highlanders, where the latter maintained their internal affairs through their own political institutions and customary laws and simultaneously maintained a tributary mode of relation with the plains. The ideological rationalization to this structure was provided through Hinduism, as an organized religion that got embedded in the plains of Assam, Manipur and Tripura during this phase. Thus, there was a multiple authority structure in the region whereby the kinship based ethnic power structure prevailed in the highlands whereas the mendicant elements of organized Hinduism flourished in the plains. Colonial rule is usually homogenizing in nature where

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the colonial state tries to impose an overarching homogeneity upon its subjects and resources. This process got initiated in India's North East but there were certain special traits that marked the colonial rule in this region. Although the region was subjugated by the colonial state at different points of time there were certain differences between administering the plains and the hills. It is observed that in case of the highlanders, the heterogeneity of the traditional power structure was maintained as anthropological categories yet they ceased to be independent politico-economic categories. In other words, it was a 'structured-subordination' where the tribal themselves maintained their internal affairs with minimum interference but the chiefs and elites within their set-up were subordinated to the colonial interest. In terms of the access to the resources in these areas there was a sort of 'conservation dissolution' principle where anything that served the 'private good interest' was preserved but if it went against this interest, it was dissolved. So in the colonial structure, the institution of chieftainship and associated management of resources prevailed to some extent yet the basic allegiance of the system was towards the colonial state rather than the community. Any deviation in this arrangement was to be crushed by military might of the colonial power state. On the other, the integration of the people of the region in general and highlands in particular was facilitated by Christianity and Evangelization, which provided the ideological rationalization for the power structure. Moreover, the colonial–positivist jurisprudence introduced such arrangements related to property, its use and ownership right that was hitherto unknown in the region. Thus, many institutions emerged with the Settlement Rights, Agreements and Sanads that influenced far-reaching changes for the region. Post-colonial Indian state has augmented germinating the seeds of inequality and differentiation which its colonial predecessors sowed but due to paucity of time was unable to reap fully. The difference was that now it was undertaken with the facade of liberal constitutionalism. The region due to its long international border has always been viewed through the prism of security and an ever-looming threat perception haunted the Indian state from its inception. Moreover, the prevalence of unfamiliar politico-economic structures and a different socio-cultural milieu in the region and the repeated attempt by the nation-builders to understand the region with the various yardsticks of mainland complicated the situation further. The statist construction of the nation by the Indian state was confronted by

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different narrations of nationhood in the region; North East therefore symbolized the 'rebel consciousnesses'. The elites, whom the British had already bestowed with untribal features, now fluctuated between the allurement of liberal constitutionalism of the Indian state and the rebel consciousness of the region, as their tribesmen went through the serious problem of coping up with the changed environment. Different tribes became attuned to reactive politics, which when acting as a countervailing force against the overarching homogenizing tendency of the Indian state became overwhelmingly identity based as well as territoriality based in nature. The ethnic state became the backlash against the powerful nation-state. But the elites of these ethnic formations were unable to forge a pan regional tribal identity as they remained entrapped within the precincts of micro-tribal formations. Pluralization of ethnicities weakened the ethnic mobilization and thereby the all-enveloping homogenizing force of the Indian state prevailed.

Globalization was introduced in India as a part of the New Economic Policy in 1991 under the leadership of P.V. Narsimha Rao, the then Prime Minister of India and his Finance Minister Manmohan Singh who happened to be the chief architect of the new economic policy. In continuation of India's economic globalization, the then Government of India announced the Look East Policy (now rechristened it as Act East Policy) to connect India's Northeast with Southeast Asia and also integrate it into the world economy. It tries to connect India with the countries in Southeast Asia and the Far East through North Eastern states by road, train, and waterways and increase trade exchanges with them bilaterally and multilaterally. The physical connectivity will be through transnational highways (AH 1), railway line (TAR) and waterways (through KMMTTP). In the Indo-Myanmar border, border trading points are opened up for border trade in Moreh in Manipur and Zokhawthar in Mizoram. Most of the projects under India's AEP (economic globalization) are yet to be completed however it is expected to complete in the next few years. Once the projects are completed the landscape and topography of the region will also be transformed positively. The impact of globalization in the region is however more negative than positive so far.

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Globalization and Identity Crisis in Northeast India

Identities in Northeast are mostly constructed around ethno-nationalisms. The politics of identity therefore centralizes difference as the most important marker thereby recognizing cultural difference of which an identity is a producer as well as a product. The politics of difference holds good so far as there are no boundary crossings, but it becomes problematic and looks skewed when the boundary of exclusivity is blurred under, let us say intense democratization of a society with increasing acceptance of the other or under globalization blurring all boundaries. It thus gestures toward an internal contradiction that while excluding the other it seeks to be recognized by it. Therefore, difference is not self-generative but always another- contributed marker. When we come to the Northeast region of India, the ongoing process of globalization makes the region more complex. The Northeast region is well known to be a confluence of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Basically, we do not find any other place in India with such diversity in culture and tradition as present in the North East region. The different religions and cultures make the region even more complex. From ethnic point of view the people of the region may conversely be divided into two broad groups, the "Indid" and the "Mongoloid" "Indid" group mostly comprises the Hindu castes and the Muslims, while the "Mongoloid" group includes various tribes, both in hills and in plains and also other Mongoloid populations that have not been referred to as tribals. The main linguistic groups are Tibeto-Mangolism, Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman and Austric. In fact, the region is the homeland of multi-culture tradition, religion, language and diverse ethnicity.

Ethnicity is often identified with the ideas of primordialism based on descent, race, kinship, territory, language, history, etc. Ethnicity can be classified into two groups - instrumental ethnicity which emanates from material deprivation. In certain cases, ethnic identity is intrinsically connected with language. Language is very often becoming a maker of cultural differences. The politics of northeast India is marked by ethnicity and extremism for a long time. The assertion of various ethnic identities and the attitude of the state in containing ethnic extremism make the region distinct from the rest of India. The root cause of ethnic assertion can be found in the identity crisis of various tribal communities who extend over the territorial boundaries drawn by the Indian

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nation state. Most of the ethnic assertions are due to ethnic groups' desperate attempts to protect their identity, culture and language. For instance, it is argued that "claims to ethno-nationalism of the Bodos can be interpreted as closely intertwined with issues of institutional and social exclusion based on language politics". In other words, the basis of ethnic assertion can be seen in two contexts. Firstly, the tribal communities' subjective consciousness of being excluded oppressed and marginalized. Secondly, the process of development failed to address the legitimate concerns of the people. Though after independence the Indian state tried to integrate and assimilate various ethnic communities in the mainstream national identity, the development process generated a feeling of alienation among them. Moreover, development led to the unequal distribution of resources across the communities and regions. Thus, both non-economic (subjective consciousness) and economic (material) factors created a sense of exclusion among some ethnic communities.

Globalization has greatly affected the folk life of the tribes of the North East India both in positive as well as negative ways. The positive impact includes spread of culture of the North Eastern people to different parts of the world, acquaintance and integration of the traditional life style of the developed regions of the world, spread of cultural heritage and economic gains through this and so on. The process of globalization opens a new door for the North East region to get acquainted with modern life style of highly developed nations of different parts of the world. Hence this is a process of assimilation, exploration and integration through an exchange of culture, tradition, beliefs and customs. Some positive outcomes of this assimilation involve spread of education, exchange of ideas, and imitation of other culture which opens up the broadness of mind and there is an easy acceptance of things. Some more significant impacts of globalization are the end of superstitious beliefs and the exposure of traditional folk assets such as dance, music, art, literature and artifacts before the world. The most remarkable aspect of this impact has been in the field of folk dance and folk music. The traditional dance and music have become remarkably popular in the global world over the last few years. Many people across the world now know about the Bihu dance and Bihu songs of the Assamese, Bagrumba and Bordoisikhla of the Bodo, Laiharawa of the Manipuri and Gumrag dance of the Missing. Besides commercialization of these

dance forms and music globalization results in also immense economic benefits for the respective regions which the above-mentioned tribes belong to. Traditional food and their medicinal values have attracted a huge interest of the people from different places and commercialization of these food and medicines get a good market too. Globalization plays an important role in the traditional skill and knowledge of the tribal and ethnic groups. They have found exposure to show their talent and efficiency to other states as well as at the international level. Silk industries of Assam have benefitted in the global market in a remarkable way. Promotion of tourism and cultural heritage is another positive and profitable impact of globalization. Nowadays it is seen that more and more tourists from the distant places of the world come to visit the North East India. Globalization gives ample employment opportunities and avenues in different Industrial set ups with extended facilities.

Conclusion

In all likelihood, globalization for North East India seems to have a great effect. On one hand, the Indian state has started to look beyond the 'security' dimension associated with this region during the entire process of post-colonial nation building but while doing so 'it' seems to further the economic imperative by utilizing the cultural affinities of the people of the region with their ethnic counterparts beyond the international borders. The Look East Policy seems to be a policy document in this direction. Globalization has affected the traditions and cultures of the Northeastern tribes. As a result, the traditional life style of the Northeastern tribes is changing very quickly. But it is very complicated to make sure whether it is changing for better or worse. From the above analysis it is cleared that globalization process has affected the folk life of the Northeastern tribes both positively and negatively. In the context of the tribes of Northeast India, globalization is standing as a threat for their unique identities. However, it is hoped that globalization may bring a huge benefit to the traditional societies as well as to the traditional culture, beliefs and living style of the Northeast Indian tribes.

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Thus, Institutional changes supporting economic enhancement and growth at a social level requires economic incentives, supported by political will. With India moving into a new era of economic liberation, the North East region should not be left out. The framework for development of the region can be broadly based upon four vital components. The first component of this development plan should be social empowerment. It needs to empower rural communities, create sustainable institutions so that they manage common activities around microfinance, livelihoods and natural resource management. The second component needs to be economic empowerment. The objective of this component should ideally be to develop the capacity of rural communities to plan and manage funds for various economic initiatives and common activities for the public. The third component will be partnership development. The objective of this component should be to partner with various service providers, resource institutions and public and private sector organizations to bring resources such as finance, technology, and marketing into the project so that the community groups are able to improve their livelihoods. The fourth and final component will be project management. This will facilitate various governance, implementation, co-ordination, learning and quality enhancement efforts in the project. If all these components implemented in the North East region with the ever-present globalization, the area has a potentiality to become one of the most self-sufficient and significant players in the socioeconomic and geopolitical field of India.

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