Abstract

Along with social mobility and increased foreign direct investment, globalization of culture has been a significant outcome of neoliberalism. When borders are opened up and the travel between the nations has increased, a visible change is perceptible in the cultural sphere of India. Several strands of cultural globalization are identifiable in the society. From Americanization to McDonaldization, cultural globalization has a strong relation with the US. Apart from the obvious cultural factors, undercurrents of economic aspects play a deciding role in cultural globalization. Culture will take on a commodified and commercial quality and people become mere receptors of the products designed by the culture industry.

I. INTRODUCTION TO ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

Economic liberalization and resultant neoliberal measures by the Indian government have opened up the floodgates of change in India. Along with the social mobility and increased foreign direct investment, globalization of culture has been a significant outcome of neoliberalism. When borders have been opened up and the travel between the nations has increased, a visible change is perceptible in the cultural sphere of India. The word “culture” carries within itself a large array of meanings: It includes customs, beliefs, values, ideas, language, institutions, rituals, ceremonies, works of art, tools, techniques, etc. In the opinion of de la Dehesa ¹:

"Culture for a society, a group or a person is a continual process of sustaining an identity through the coherence gained by a consistent aesthetic point of view, a moral conception of self, and a style of life which exhibits those conceptions in the objects that adorn one’s home and oneself and in the taste which expresses those points of view. Culture is thus the realm of sensibility, of emotion and moral temper, and of the intelligence, which seeks to order these feelings."
India has long been proud of its cultural diversity. Various religious and cultures co-exist in India with peace. But with the economic liberalization and globalization, India is witnessing a new homogenization of culture - a common culture spreading throughout India. Although there is a significant opposition from the national culture, the advancement of the global culture in India is significant. The cultural globalization is preceded by the economic globalization. With the advancement of multinational companies and new corporate media, generation of profit becomes a key agenda. According to Omar Lizardo

One is a systemic macro level perspective usually referred to as the cultural/media imperialism thesis. The other is a more micro level approach that attempts to describe and theorize the way in which the consumption of global culture is integrated into everyday routines and traditional ways of life. The media imperialism approach is distinctive in the close attention that it pays to macro structural inequalities in cultural exchange, patterns of ownership of cultural industries and infrastructural and technological divides across the economically dominant and dominated regions of the world. It is also notable in its attempt to decry these inequalities. It sees cultural globalization mainly as bringing with it the end of national cultural diversity. Globalization is thus mainly conceived as sapping the vitality of indigenous cultural worlds. These are theorized as being replaced by the homogenous sterility of a U.S. dominated global popular culture industry. This theoretical approach can without much worry about oversimplifying, be thought of as a—Frankfurt-school inspired—global version of “mass culture theory.”

Globalization establishes itself through political, economic and cultural fronts. Free trade agreements, freedom from class monopolization, monitoring and control amount to the economic facets of globalization. The political dimension towards globalization is characterized by the decentralization of power which amount to economic liberalization and other neoliberal measures. Cultural front comprises the universalization of value systems which allows varying levels of cultural differentiation. One of the most curious features of cultural globalization comprises the severing of cultural divisions with respect to popular culture (pop culture) and high culture. In the opinion of Waters:

[These] populations have become more unwilling to surrender individual autonomy to superordinate organizations and have legitimated that claim by reference to universalized standards. This has involved an invocation of new political symbols and therefore a revitalization of cultural effectivity. The symbolic appeals center on human rights, the planetary environment, liberal democratization, consumption rights, religious traditionalism, ethnic diversification, and cosmopolitanism, each of which institutionalizes globalizing practices and phenomenologies. Cultural action is now disrupting states,
especially where they are most highly organized, and party politics is being disrupted by universalizing and diffuse social movements. Territorial boundaries are thus becoming more difficult to maintain. Meanwhile the economy is becoming dominated by lifestyle choices, both in terms of the displacement of production by consumption as the central economic activity and in terms of the diversification of possible occupational experiences. The economy is becoming symbolically mediated and reflexive, which detaches it from locality.

One of the significant aspects of the new cultural globalization is that the homogenization of the culture does not lead to a global culture, but it largely represents an “Americanization” of culture. With the supremacy of American corporations in the world stage and its successful penetration in the local markets have led to an outpour of American symbols of culture across the globe. In India also the wave of Americanization is visible. From fast growing American fast food chains like Mac Donald’s to fashion and accessories, the American cultural signifiers have made an inroad into the Indian cultural space. Aply, sociologist George Ritzer devised the term “McDonaldization” to represent the new trends brought about by globalization. According to him, the values and doctrines of the fast food restaurant are influencing the people across the globe. The dominance of Hollywood in the global film industry has a great impact on the acceptance of American cultural ways by the rest of the world. As put by de la Dehesa in Winners and Losers in Globalization: “… the industries producing content and the key means of communication are generally US owned, from AOL to Time Warner to Disney, from Microsoft and Viacom to Yahoo and Google.”

The size of the US market, the dominance of the US economy, and spread of American cultural signifiers through media contribute a lot to the” Americanization of culture” across the world. But the resistance from the nationalist factions is ever more evident. They see cultural globalization as an unwelcome development challenging the national culture and identity. The resultant clash between the cultures is predicted by Samuel Huntington in his article “The Clash of Civilizations”. He proposes that the sources of conflict in the globalizing world are neither ideological nor economic, but cultural:

The fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics.

The flow of resources, both material and logistic creates an integrated and interconnected society. The transnational culture shows more flexibility and openness than the national culture, which often is perceived as xenophobic and jingoistic. Arjun Appadurai in his argument on global cultural economy recognizes different fields in cultural globalization and transnational cultural flow. They include: “ethnoscapes”
characterized by the flow of individuals across the globe, “technoscapes” signified by the dissemination of technology, “finanscapes” specified through the distribution of money and the capital, “mediascapes” indicated by the diffusion and distribution of technology, and “ideoscapes” signifies by the transmission and circulation of values and ideas. The more prompt these flows, the more accelerated the cultural globalization becomes.

II. THE ROLE OF THE NATION STATE AND ITS IMPACT ON NATIONAL CULTURE

With the increased cultural globalization, the significance of nation state as a cultural regulator and preserver is dwindling. When local cultures get absorbed in the increasing wave of cultural globalization, the cultural plurality and clashes between various religious and ethnic group are likely to be on the wane. Moreover, cultural globalization has the potential to bring the periphery to the center. It is likely that various religious minorities segregated owing to their religious identity get a chance to come into the mainstream. Coming out from the suppressive caste and religious identity, cultural globalization has a homogenizing potential, especially for a socially and religiously volatile society like India.

Cultural globalization is beheld as both a positive and a negative force. Those who oppose (globophobia) view it as a peril that jeopardizes the integrity and uniqueness of the nation state. They assume it as a threat to the local cultures and traditions. With a strong capitalist base, cultural globalization is perceived as a menace which has the potential to wipe away the entire economic base of regional and local sustainable enterprises. George Ritzer pronounces on the need of viewing cultural globalization between the two extreme positions:

…the preceding is related to the chasm that exists between those who are fans of, and favor, globalization (globaphilia) and those who fear it and are opposed to it (globaphobia). Those who are globaphiliacs see much to celebrate about globalization. They tend to emphasize its positive, and to deemphasize its negative, sides. Those associated with globaphobia tend to see people as "victims" of globalization and its largely negative consequences. Then there are middle-ground positions on this: "neither globaphobia nor globaphilia seem entirely justified. Globalization is neither a limitless source of benefit to humanity, as some claim, nor is it guilty of all the ills for which it is held responsible.

III. THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Globalization is viewed as an important process which enables the transfer of technological progress around the world. Through measures of trade liberalization, developing countries learn to adapt and assimilate new technologies that are imported from the developed world. With capital liberalization, foreign direct investments have flourished which in turn resulted in creating more jobs and better salaries. The liberalization of labour flows and immigration rules allow the labour movements to be
more flexible and in turn result in better education, skill improvement, and exposure to world class technologies. According to De La Dehesa “ [...] globalization can help world convergence, not only through the possibility of developing countries to import and export more and to obtain inflows of locally scarce capital, but also through increasing knowledge and faster technological transfer.”

The expansion of international production is a key requisite for the internationalization of the state which involves the integration of production process, where different phases of production are outsourced to different countries. Through direct investment, international production expands. The possession of knowledge is the great advantage of direct investment. As Robert Cox comments: “…the essential feature of direct investment is possession, not of money, but of knowledge in the form of technology, and especially in the capacity to continue to develop new technology.” As a result, the opportunities are opened up for the wealthy to make money easily. With the latest technology, they manage to move huge amounts of money around the world, and get to speculate on them. Unfortunately, technology rarely makes any influence on the living conditions of the poor: According to Zygmunt Bauman:

New fortunes are born, sprout and flourish in the virtual reality, tightly isolated from the old-fashioned rough-and-ready realities of the poor. The creation of wealth is on the way to finally emancipating itself from its perennial constraining and vexing – connections with making things, processing materials, creating jobs and managing people. The old rich needed the poor to make and keep them rich. That dependency at all times mitigated the conflict of interest and prompted some effort, however tenuous, to care. The new rich do not need the poor any more. At long last the bliss of ultimate freedom is nigh.

The impact of cultural globalization is accentuated through technological progresses. With internet, video calling and social networking sites, information dissemination becomes prompt and popular. Social networking sites and the large number of people using its platform use it mainly for information sharing, opinion making, and for entertainment purposes. The cultural give and take through social networking platforms is undeniable. Youth culture is moulded and shaped to a great extent through popular social networking platforms like “facebook” and “twitter.”

IV. ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

English language is perceived as the vehicle of cultural globalization. From the colonial times, the language carries within itself the propaganda of global dominance and supremacy. With globalization and the supremacy of the US in the global trade and commerce, English naturally becomes the language of globalization. With the revolution in the information technology sector impacts the lives of people across the globe, English
becomes the preferred language of choice. Jagdish Bhagwati illustrates how cultural globalization is brought about through English language:

Indeed, no better illustration of this hybridization, the co-opting and refashioning of English idiom, grammar, and spelling to mesh with local color, is provided than by Salman Rushdie, who extravagantly tosses together Bombay slang and impeccable English in his novels touched by the magic realism that, in turn, is borrowed from South America’s gifted writers.

… In fact, as one looks around the world, one sees that the local use of indigenous languages has also revived, alongside and at times in response to the spreading international use of English. The rise of multiculturalism and the celebration of ethnicity rather than its extinction are modern phenomena that defy the global pessimists’ dire predictions.

V. ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The basic force behind globalization is economic, not cultural in orientation. When commodities assume significance more than the “use value” and consumed as a fetish, commodification of cultural symbols takes place. This in effect will lead to the manipulation of the ordinary people by the capitalist system. Culture will take on a commoditized and commercial quality and people become mere receptors of the products designed by culture industry. Cultural homogenization in such a contest is highly dangerous and deceptive. As Peter Lunt and Sonia Livingstone suggest:

Marx was concerned with consumption only in so far as he saw the desire for goods as fetish which clouds political consciousness by introducing false choices and concerns and by mystifying actual processes of exploitation. In this he influenced the critical theory of Frankfurt school, which regarded popular culture as vacuous, not affording possibilities for real intellectual thinking, and as the site of the manipulation of the working classes by capital. Thus, until recently, the expansion of popular culture was seen as the process through which capital produced the false identity of individualism in order to manipulate the masses.

Thomas Friedman gives an instance of cultural globalization in the US in his book *Lexus and the Olive Tree*:

We have nineteen employees. Three were born in Vietnam, two scientists and one administrator; two were born in Canada, both scientists; one was born in Germany, a scientist; one was born in Peru, a scientist; one was born in Malaysia, a scientist; one was born in China, a scientist; one is from Iran, a scientist; and one is from India, a scientist. The rest of us are native-born Americans. I cannot think of another country in the world where you could so easily put such a team together.

Although Friedman’s analysis is in relation to the US, it gives an indication towards the course of the world in the future. In the globalized world, there is no turning away from cultural globalization. When insular nations open its doors towards the world, the
best and worst of the world culture seeps in. Rather than holding on to conservative positions, opening up to the changes is inevitable in the journey towards progress and modernity. Culture, like all the other social constructs is liable to change with respect to changing social scenarios. Not accepting that change is retrogressive and segregating.

VI. REFERENCES


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