

How to Cite:

Kazi, M. d. M. R. (2022). Globalization and folk culture of North-East India: An analytical review. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S1), 6744–6751.
<https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS1.6773>

Globalization and folk culture of North-East India – An analytical review

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Abstract---In the age of globalisation and technological change, not only economies but also individuals and cultures frequently encounter and interact in the global domain. This has added a new dimension to the cultural environment. The North-Eastern Region (NER) of India is home to hundreds of ethnic groups and is distinguished by a diverse traditional heritage of tribal (folk) arts and culture. The present study examines the cultural aspect of globalisation and its ramifications for the folk (tribal) cultures of North-East India. This is basically an analytical study and based mainly on secondary information. The study concludes that globalisation is inescapable in the current situation, and that the tribes of NER should accept globalisation if they want to prosper and compete with the rest of the world. However, extreme caution should be exercised in order to limit the negative and unanticipated impacts of globalisation on the region's traditional culture.

Keywords---Globalization, Culture, Folk Culture, Identity, North-East India.

Introduction

The North-Eastern Region (NER) of India, which includes eight states: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura, is home to hundreds of ethnic groups, the majority of whom are classified as scheduled tribes (STs) under the Indian Constitution. The NER is distinguished for its rich traditional heritage of tribal or folk arts and culture. Each tribe or ethnic group has its own cultural identity. Since time immemorial, the diverse art and cultural forms of the region's tribals and rural people have continued to shine. However, in the era of globalisation, culture has become a commodity, and there has been a significant change in the cultural life of Indians, and India's NER is no exception. Globalization has already had an influence on

the lives and cultures of the people in the region and has produced a variety of responses. Some people are concerned that large-scale change and commodification of folk cultures may obliterate their distinctive identities, but others believe that globalisation and technology innovation present opportunities for marketing traditional cultural objects as well as their preservation. Although there are few studies on the cultural aspects of globalisation, research on the effects of globalisation on the folk culture of North-East India is scarce. The current study seeks to bridge this gap to some extent by analyzing the cultural dimension of globalisation and its ramifications for North-East Indian folk cultures. The research will contribute to the current body of knowledge and may aid future research in the form of a literature on folk culture and globalisation.

Objective and Methodology

The main objective of this study is to analyze the cultural component of globalization and its ramifications for the folk cultures of India's NER. The present study is analytical in character, and it is mainly based on secondary data gathered from journals, books, magazines, newspapers, and the internet.

Concepts of culture and cultural diffusion

To be precise, the term *culture* refers to the set of customs, traditions and values of a society or community. Tylor (1871) defined culture as: "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".

According to Webster's Third New International Dictionary "culture is the total pattern of human behaviour and its products embodied in speech, action, and artifacts and dependent upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations". Thus, culture encompasses the complete spectrum of acquired human behaviour patterns such as language, beliefs, rituals and traditions, social institutions, knowledge and skills, and everything else that people learn that constitutes a society's 'style of living.' Culture is typically passed down from generation to generation through the socialization process.

Folk culture is the culture formed by local communities and is rooted in ordinary people's experiences, customs, and beliefs. It is often followed by a small, homogenous group of rural residents. Traditional folk music, folk songs, storytelling, folk dances, and traditional clothing, jewellery, foods, and so on are all examples of folk culture that are passed down from generation to generation. In contrast to folk culture, *Popular culture* (also known as mass culture or pop culture) is usually practised by a large, heterogeneous group of people who share certain practices despite differences in personal qualities. Popular culture consists of mass-produced, standardized, and short-lived items, sometimes of minor substance and viewed by some as having no enduring 'artistic' worth, and is primarily focused with making money for large corporations, particularly the mass media. It should be mentioned that folk customs differ from place to place, whereas popular customs change from time to time within the same place. Furthermore, folk culture is more authentic than popular culture.

Cultural diffusion refers to the dissemination of cultural traits. Cultural diffusion, in other words, is the spread of ideas or products from one culture to another. Cultural diffusion is encouraged by an improved transportation network, technological advancement, and improved education. Since all these factors are on the rise, cultures are diffusing at an increasing rate. Cultural diffusion can result in both cultural divergence and cultural convergence. Cultural divergence happens when different cultural influences cause a region to split into distinct parts, whereas cultural convergence occurs when different cultures share ideas and become increasingly similar. Nowadays, cultural diffusion is resulting in worldwide cultural convergence. Every society learns about what is going on in other societies relatively fast through a variety of media such as air travel, newspapers, television, telephones, and the internet. Furthermore, every community takes or adapts what it finds most beneficial in other societies. This cultural convergence has resulted in the formation of a global culture. The spread of democratic principles, the English language, technology, global sports, and even foods and fashion are examples of this.

Globalization and Culture

The term "globalisation" generally refers to the integration of different countries' economic, political, and socio-cultural systems throughout the world. It is a process of increasing global socio-economic interdependence through increased exchange of goods and services, capital and technology, as well as global interaction and interconnectedness of people and culture. Globalisation, in other words, is the process through which the diverse world is unified into a single society. It is a well-known fact that, as a result of globalisation and the technological revolution, not only economies, but also people and cultures, often encounter and interact in the global domain. This has added a new dimension to the cultural setting.

In the globalized era, culture has become a commodity, and the entire world has become a cultural common market. According to Baral (2006), globalisation cuts across the national boundaries, cultures, and societies, promotes greater global integration, and enables interdependence and the development of a global culture. Global culture refers to how cultures in different places of the world have become more similar. Now-a-days, the same cultural and consumer products are sold all over the world. Many television broadcasters, for example, offer their programmes and programme formats on a global scale. McDonald's, Coca-Cola, KFC, Pizza Hut, Nescafé, Sony, Samsung, and many other firms' products, including the consumer lifestyles and culture associated with them, are today known in almost every country across the globe. Almost anywhere in the globe, one can now buy an identical product. Thus, globalisation promotes a global culture while undermining national and local cultures. Many people argue that globalisation is an extension of Western capitalism, and facilitated by a free market economy, globalisation perpetuates neocolonialism (Baral, 2006). Smith (2000) thinks that because globalisation originated in the West, it is their ideas, ideologies, values, and lifestyles that are promoted and evangelized across the rest of the world. As a result, culture has largely become a one-way corporate operating mode in the global economy. Rich and powerful nations' cultural goods and services have infiltrated worldwide marketplaces, putting people and cultures in other countries

at a disadvantage. Globalization, however, produces varied of responses on culture. Sometimes global culture gets inhabited in local domains, resulting in a micro global; other times, local culture rises to the heights of the global-dome, resulting in a macro local; and yet other times, both global and local culture generate a hybrid – a glocal (Jena, 2010). The term 'glocalization' refers to the process through which global culture conforms to local conditions without displacing them.

Pieterse (2004) identified three contradictory notions of cultural transformation in the globalized era. First, greater global interdependence and interconnectedness might result in increased cultural standardization and uniformity. This notion of change is termed as the homogenization paradigm. Second, market-centric globalisation is infiltrating deeply into local and regional cultures, which see the process as a threat to their survival. As a result, there is a greater assertion of identities to resist against onslaught of globalization. This notion of transformation is referred to as the cultural clash or identity paradigm. The third notion is the hybridization paradigm. This differs from the previous two in that it emphasizes on the process of trans-local cultural mixing as manifested in cultural heterogeneity and hybridization (Mohapatra, 2012).

Regarding the global culture, Appadurai (1996) has discussed about five “scapes” or flows: ethnoscaples, technoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes and mediascapes. Ethnoscape refers to “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to hitherto unprecedented degree”. The term “technoscape” refers to technological flows, or the worldwide configuration of technology that moves at high speeds over many kinds of formerly impenetrable borders. The advent of new technologies, such as the internet, has enhanced cultural interactions and exchanges. Ideoscape refers to the movement of ideas and ideologies. The flow of money and global business networks beyond political borders is referred to as financescape. The term mediascape refers to the flow of media across boundaries, specifically the diffusion of electronic technologies that produce and disseminate information. Appadurai contends that the combination of these five scapes leads to cultural globalisation. He claims that global flows take place in and through the growing schism between the scapes, where global cultural systems have produced a vision of cultural confusion and chaos.

There are views that global culture, which is encompassing the world on an international scale, is an imperialistic endeavour of Western and/or American culture. According to Sarmela (1975), western ideologies, political beliefs, science, laws and social institutions, western moral concepts, sexual symbols and ideals of beauty, western working methods and leisure activities, western foods, western pop idols, and the western concept of human existence have become objectives, examples and norms throughout the world. Furthermore, the global diffusion of Western/American culture, such as Levi's, McDonald's, MTV, and Coca-Cola, has resulted in increased assimilation of local cultures from other nations into American culture, or what may be called Americanization. The term “Americanization” refers to the expanding influence of the United States of

America (Jena, 2010). Thus, cultural globalisation is said to be propagating “cultural imperialism”. Cultural imperialism refers to the industrialized nations' (especially Western countries) economic, technological, and cultural hegemony, which determines the direction of both economic and social progress, defines cultural values, and standardizes the civilization and cultural environment throughout the world (Sarmela, 1975).

Implications of globalisation for the folk culture of India's North-East

Since the 1990s, India has seen a significant increase in cultural diffusion. The cultural life of Indian society has undergone a significant transformation as a result of its liberalisation and globalisation policies. According to Singh (2002), globalisation is bound to have an impact on Indian cultures by accelerating the standardization of various cultural forms and activities in the nation, such as lifestyles, clothing, food, and so on. However, he emphasizes that the social structure and cultural system in India are inherently built on plurality and diversity. Indian society is divided into communities, each of which has a great deal of cultural autonomy. This provides enormous cultural resilience to communities in India, enabling them to filter the effects of globalisation through refractory and prismatic adaptation. Furthermore, we can see a strong sense of self-consciousness and awareness of identity among the country's different communities. People in India strongly oppose those globalisation components that infringe on or do not promote society's core cultural values. Thus, globalisation has two aspects: homogeneity and the promotion of cultural identity. In the Indian diaspora, we can see the trends of cultural fusion. At the level of popular culture, we may see a fusion of traditional Indian forms or styles with western or global forms or styles in music, dance, theatre, cinema, and so on. The growing popular (fusion) culture is posing a threat to indigenous local, regional, or ethnic identity of cultural traditions insofar as it isolates culture from people's rhythms of life and its intrinsic expressiveness or vitality and transforms it into a community. Traditional identities that are deeply anchored in community life are turned into a faceless audience throughout this process. This is not wholly owing to globalisation, but rather to the very paradigm of modernity, which we, along with the rest of mankind, enthusiastically embrace (Singh, 2002).

The North-Eastern Region of India (NER) is a mosaic of tribal culture and beliefs. This region has many facets and faces; it is more than a map; it is a cultural and linguistic geography that is diversified, vibrant, and variegated (Gahatraj, 2014). The richness of this region is found in its vibrant cultures, rituals, customs, dances, and folklore. Globalization is perceived to be a threat to the indigenous cultures and identities of the indigenous tribes. There is an apprehension that globalisation would result in large-scale commodification of the indigenous cultures of the region's different ethnic groups, erasing their distinct identities. This is because globalisation imposes a uniform consumerist culture and value system on society, which often contradicts traditional indigenous values. Thus, it is feared that the pressure of global culture on the indigenous cultures of various tribal groups in the NER will lead to the erosion of their traditional values, eventually reducing the region's cultural diversity to the point where there will be only one large homogeneous culture – the global culture.

The globalized market has already encroached on the traditional culture and lifestyle of the people of NER. The North-Eastern states have seen a transition in cultural assimilation from Western Americanized ethos (people, system) to Korean and Japanese cultures. We can observe that Korean culture is spreading like wildfire across the NER, particularly in the states of Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland. These factors have influenced the traditional culture of the region's communities in a variety of ways. Again, globalisation has resulted in widespread exploitation or neglect of many indigenous groups in the region through the tourism sector. Because foreign tourists have easier access to the region's indigenous cultures, there is more interaction between the two (indigenous and foreign), which is not always equal. Western tourists often view indigenous communities as appealing relics of the past that they may enjoy. Tourists often regard themselves as superior to indigenous people and entitled of being served. Furthermore, by allowing unprecedented access to indigenous cultures, globalisation increases the danger of misrepresentation, stereotyping, and the loss of cultural and intellectual property rights.

The identity of a person or a community is inextricably linked to the idea of culture. People's identities are typically formed by the cultures and subcultures to which they belong. The search for identity and self-affirmation is a major issue in the NER, with highly emotional content. However, Boro (2006) asserts that identity and its uniqueness are tricky questions in the present context. Identity, like any other practice in a society, is an evolving concept, with the exception that in a symbolic form, it reflects ethnic, linguistic, and cultural markers and differences. He claims that in a globalized cultural space, identities cannot remain pure and uncontaminated because each community continues to learn from other communities, and thus the process of acculturation continues, resulting in hybrid identities.

Apart from identity, it is also important to investigate the effects of globalisation on NER's indigenous music, textile designs, handicrafts, herbal medicines, dance styles, and so on. Globalization has enabled a much wider audience to see, hear, and experience cultural products of the region that were previously inaccessible to them. According to Boro (2006), globalisation offers huge opportunities for showcasing the region's exotic folk cultures and traditional products. This will attract consumers from all over the world, bringing substantial benefits to the tribes of India's NER. However, he contends that the preservation of the cultural heritage of smaller communities is an important issue that must be addressed. Each tribe in the NER has a distinct cultural heritage, and hence, they should be empowered to negotiate for their rights over folk products in any transaction. Therefore, there should be a government-controlled monitoring agency to facilitate trade while preventing outsiders from entering the region for personal gain and greed (Boro, 2006).

The global technological mechanism can be used for cultural self-representation and large-scale information dissemination. Besides, global media may provide cultures a distinctive voice in order to raise awareness and public knowledge and understanding of different ethnic groups' cultures and identities. It also enables ethnic groups to share relevant accounts and commentary on issues crucial to the preservation of their cultures. Thus, instead of destroying cultures, global

media may help in the popularization and preservation of ethnic cultures. Language, customs, and culture may indeed be preserved through technology. Moreover, globalisation brings world-class technology, and by providing autonomy and empowerment, it may allow for self-representation and the preservation of personal and collective identity of the tribal groups. Global technology has offered the opportunity to redefine collective identity while also establishing a space for unique cultures. Global social, political, and economic networks, combined with common goals, will undoubtedly facilitate the growing empowerment of cultural communities (Smith, 2000).

Modern global technology has made significant contributions to information sharing through social networking platforms such as 'Facebook,' 'Twitter,' and many more. Using global networking services, ethnic groups in the region may learn from other communities across the world about how to address cultural and identity related issues. Social networking may serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas and methods, as well as the mobilization of views and campaigns to publicize and safeguard the indigenous culture of the NER. Thus, global technology can be utilized as an instrument to generate public awareness and public support across the globe on the cultural heritage of the region. Global awareness of ethnic groups may promote empathy, understanding, and tolerance among people from other regions/countries, as well as pressure from other regions/countries and international organisations for national reform in favour of tribal cultures and ethnic identities. Moreover, global markets for cultural products may generate employment, economic prospects, and educational opportunities.

Conclusion

Globalization is not an un-mixed blessing. It has both positive and negative effects on a region's or a country's cultural diversity. In a globalized society, the culture of a specific group or region is evolving as a result of increased interaction with other cultures. Moreover, culture changes as a result of changing socioeconomic and political situations. "People make culture, culture produces people," Tomlinson (1999) remarked. People create culture; thus, they are not only objects of cultural influences, but subjects who may reject or incorporate different influences after careful scrutiny. Although globalisation may reflect some kind of convergence and hegemonic control theory in terms of science and technology or economic progress, in a deeper sense, it promotes cultural identity. People in India's NER have become much more concerned with the uniqueness and particularity of their own culture, and they are constantly searching for and defending their cultural origins in the age of globalisation. In other words, globalisation has brought a considerably greater awareness of cultural identity among the people of India's NER than before. However, there are certain disadvantages of globalisation. By promoting a homogeneous consumerist culture and value system in society, globalisation has the potential to result in large-scale commercialization of indigenous cultures of the tribes in the region and, in the process, may erase their unique identities. Further, by providing unprecedented access to indigenous cultures, globalisation raises the risk of misrepresentation, stereotyping, and the loss of cultural rights and identity.

Regardless of the benefits and drawbacks, practically everyone thinks that globalisation cannot be reversed or avoided. Whether we support or oppose globalisation, it is undeniably an ever-expanding phenomenon. If the tribals of India's NER want to prosper and compete with the rest of the world, they must welcome globalisation. However, the negative and unintended outcomes must be addressed.

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