



Globalisation and De-historisation of Identity: A Study in the Context of North East India

Dilip Hazarika

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dudhnoi College, Assam, India

* Corresponding Author: **Dilip Hazarika**

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Abstract

Globalisation is a process that cuts across the boundaries of nations, cultures and societies privileging a move towards larger integration of the world and facilitating interdependence moving towards a global culture. The process often poses a threat to culture and identity of the marginalised people because it brings in large scale commoditization of the cultures and erase their unique identities. Therefore, a vehement articulation of the local for preservation of indigenous cultures and identities could be seen alongside the process of globalisation.

In this study, an attempt has been made to analyse the effect of globalisation in the north-east India in the shaping of identity. Identity, in this region, is formed basically on ethno-nationalistic feature of various tribes or group of people. These people are identified in terms of differences and uniqueness they possess from the other. With the rapid development of technology in the age of globalisation, this difference is increasingly blurred and a culture based on common interest emerges. The unique characteristics of each group will slowly fade away, and the various groups will turn into a homogenous group. Therefore, it can be said that the effect of globalisation can essentially lead to de-historization of identities to form a hybrid identity where a person's identity is formed by values inherited traditionally and acquired from other culture. It is, therefore, not impossible to say that in the distant future the identity politics will cease to exist at the face of globalisation which has the potentiality to reduce the identity into anonymity.

Keywords: globalisation, identity, commoditisation, de-historization, anonymity

Introduction

Globalization is basically a 21st century phenomenon. It transforms the large world into a global village by transfiguring geographical boundaries virtually accessible. This process cuts across the boundaries of nations, cultures and societies enabling a move towards interdependence and a global culture. In this global village where information is in abundance, every community is expected to be benefitted economically and socially. Even the marginalized section of the society can find an opportunity to mainstream them. However, the silence of the marginalized did not go away as expected. Rather, it makes it more deafening. The impact of globalization has also affected the marginalized culture across the globe and put the concept of identity in a vortex of crisis, as if something fixed and stable is displaced by doubt and uncertainty.

In the context of North-east India, crisis of identity is felt more strongly than anywhere else in India. North-East India is a home to hundreds of ethnic tribes. Their identity is defined by their own culture and tradition. With the influence of Globalization, the traditional identity of the north-east people underwent huge changes. It is feared that the Globalization will de-historicise identities to develop a hybrid identity.

Review of Literature

Assessment of the impact of Globalization on native culture in the north-east region of India is a topic of much discussion among the thinkers and writers recently. All these discussion is chiefly based on a set binary - resistance vs positive impact of the globalization.

In the essay *Globalization and Tribes of Northeast India* Kailash C. Boral writes that when we look around us today we find what is specific and local acquires the object of global desire while the so-called global circulates freely, unhindered in the local market. For this reason it is feared that globalization may bring in large-scale commodification of their cultures and would erase their unique identities that are so far consolidated mostly on the premise of ethnic difference. Mizo, Khasi and Naga perspective towards globalization is also to be found in different writings where similar concern of losing one's cultural identity is stressed. However, essays like *Globalization and Local Cultures: The Tribes of North East India*, discusses the various avenues of opportunities that globalization may bring to the people of north east. Though all these writing focused primarily on the positive and negative aspect of globalization, the changing identity of the people of the region is also discussed elaborately. Keeping all these arguments in mind, this present paper tries to address the identity question of the people of north east India in near future.

Objectives

The objective of the paper is to analyze the effect of globalization in the north-east India in the shaping of identity. Identity, in this region, is formed basically on ethno-nationalistic feature of various tribes or group of people. These people are identified in terms of differences and uniqueness they possess from the other. With the rapid development of technology in the age of globalization, this difference is increasingly blurred and a culture based on common interest emerges. The unique characteristics of each group will slowly fade away, and the various groups will turn into a homogenous group. Therefore, it can be said that the effect of globalization can essentially lead to de-historization of identities to form a hybrid identity where a person's identity is formed by values inherited traditionally and acquired from other culture. Is it, therefore, possible to say that in the distant future the identity politics will cease to exist at the face of globalization and reduce identity into anonymity?

Methodology

The method used in this paper is purely interpretative and descriptive in nature, based primarily on secondary sources of data like books, journals and internets.

Discussion

Globalization has sweeping influence on the society. It is an irresistible force. A person or a society cannot wall themselves in from the influence of the globalization. Anyone trying to be secluded from such influences, fearing that globalization will taint their purity of the culture, will find themselves isolated from the mainstream. As for instance, the Arunachalee culture was protected from outside influence during the British Raj. Even today they got protection under the Indian constitution. The result of such action undoubtedly led to preservation of cultural and traditional identities and to an exotic charm. At the same, these people began to feel a sense of isolation and found it increasingly tough to reconcile with the disadvantages of it. Demands were made for development and changes. However, any development will not come without any cost to its traditional life style. As a result, we see the opening of the gates to outsiders. Since the state abounds in scenic natural splendor, a huge number of

tourists were attracted to it. Undoubtedly, it benefited the people economically, though cultural exchange also was taking place at the same time. The insular and isolated Aurnachalee culture was rejuvenated by the outside culture which came in the form of tourism.

In an another study made on two important markets of Shillong (Police Bazar and Bara Bazaar) conducted to test the impact of globalization on the culture, a group of researchers found that globalization has directly affects the traditional culture and its related products. The Bara Bazar, a business centre of traditional cultural items, began to shrink in size and commerce, while Police Bazar, known for western products' began to thrive. (Globalization: The Khasi Perspective, author Desmond L. Kharmawphlang G. Badaiasuk Lyngdoh Nonglait Wandashisha Rynjah).

Therefore, most people were apprehensive about the fact that the influence of the outside culture will lead to commodification of their cultures and would erase their unique identities, though walling from such influence will only mean alienation and lack of development. In such context, a question comes to the mind inevitably, is there a balanced approach to globalization, where preservation of one's own culture is never compromised for the sake of western influences?

The answer to such a question is far from being simple. A practical and utilitarian approach to the globalization can somehow show us an in-between way. According to this view, which is most effectively expressed in an essay "Globalization and Local Cultures: The Tribes of North East India", Anil Boro writes that "Those who vouch for unique identity and cultural purity forget that identity like any other practice in a society is an evolving concept except that in a symbolic form it connotes the ethnic, linguistic and cultural markers and differences. Although mutations are facts of life, all that is called essential and unique in defining an identity is because of exclusion from/of the other, not as something such self-evidential. Under a globalized cultural space, the larger question is, can unique identities remain pure and uncontaminated? To speak the truth, that is not possible because each community keeps on learning from other communities and thus the process of acculturation continues. Keeping in mind the utilitarian value, a community adopts new ideas and practices. While a culture makes some readjustment in adopting the new, similarly the new is reshaped to be appropriated by a host culture. It is also true identities already, always hybridized."

Supporters of this argument believe that cultural tradition or identity of any society or tribes is not fixed or stable. It changes or is changing over the time. Globalization only expedites this change. Therefore, to believe in the concept of cultural purity is just a romantic concept. On the other hand, they believe that impact of globalization can benefit a marginalized society differently. It can bring economic prosperity by connecting hitherto neglected society to the mainstream. Moreover, it opens up another avenue through which one can showcase their culture and its products to the western world. In other words, it has the potentiality of starting eastern hegemony over the west. In the words of Anil Boro, "Once any community opens its door to the forces of globalization, its cultural assets and products are bound to be pushed for large-scale commodification and loss of their unique identities. We should take up the challenge and see to it that instead of clamouring for unique identities, which are not out there turning the advantages of globalization to our

benefit”

Forming an Identity from the perspective of the first view point means seclusion and resistance to scientific development and progress. This process of identity formation is actually based on the apprehension of losing one's uniqueness. Seen from this angle, the north east India is place of residence of many unique groups of people who bears no influences of the outsider.

Practically, it is not possible. Even the people of the remotest area in this region show western influences in their life. The identity of such persons can be compared to a person with multiple layers of influences, the core of which is formed by traditional values and the outer appearance is shaped by imported values. In the north-east region of India, this is clearly evident in the process of identity formation. Naturally, a hybridisation of identity is taking place—person carrying different identity markers at the same time.

Will this hybrid identity lead to erasure of identity in the distant future? How long an individual will identify with the traditional cultural identity markers, when he gives way to other influences on him or her? In any urban centre or city where people of different cultural roots live, they make a new cosmopolitan tribe. In such living condition, the unique identity markers of any tribe vanish, unless conscious effort is put to sustain or preserve it.

Therefore, can it be said that in the distant future the ethnographic identity of the north eastern people be erased completely in for favor of an identity based on parameters like education, establishment, success etc. From socio-economic perspective, such a proposition is viable. Politically, such a proposition is not feasible. There is power dynamic and economic benefit associated with ethno-graphic identification of the tribes. The constitution of India gives certain privilege to this people from the north-eastern region of India. Therefore, how much cosmopolitan in nature and distant from the roots due to the effect of globalization, there will always be a conscious attempt to identify with the unique characteristic of a traditional past. To think that globalization will lead to extinction of identity markers of the tribes and create a homogenous society is far from a realistic idea.

To conclude, identity of any ethnic group will change due to the impact of globalization. This change will be both internal and external. It will change their food habits, dress code etc. Knowledge of the outside world will cause internal change in them too. They will learn about western values and ethics, which will be reflected in their manner and behavior. In the 21st century, an individual identity rest on these changes. In him we find a combination of the tradition and modernity. In this hybrid existence, the rapid urban centric life style gives a cover of anonymity- an avenue to think oneself belonging to a large homogenous group without any separate identity. Life in the urban centre or metropolitan city testifies this development where individual separate identity is erased. Therefore, in the distant future when urbanization will touch most of the rural and remote places, there is a possibility that our society will be cosmopolitan in nature. In such situation, it is possible that an individual will identify themselves as a member of a homogenous group rather than identifying themselves belonging to a particular ethnic tribe. However, in reality, this is something that can never happen so easily, because the process of homogenization is blocked by power politics. What appears to be a homogenized group is divided underneath. The cover of homogenization suddenly removed when matters come to political identity of this people. Instead

of looking at one political entity in the north east region, there will be many voices demanding separate political identity. At the end, it can be said that the force of globalization is irresistible. It affects the shaping of the identity of the people too. On the one hand, it starts the process of homogenization of various tribes, at the same time; power politics will never allow this process to complete.

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