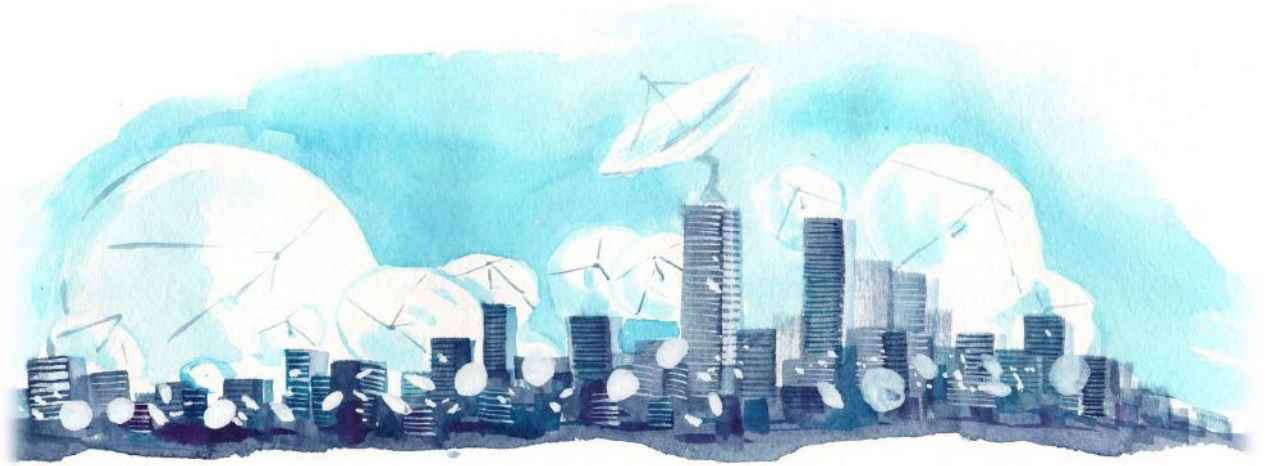


From Local to Global: A Cultural Perspective

Dr. Tapas Kumar Chatterjee



From a theoretical perspective, globalization should foster peaceful co-existence of different social systems without any sort of interference in the internal affairs of the countries but enabling each to benefit from greater levels of collaboration through trade, business, partnership, exchanges, joint ventures and so on. Similarly, globalization in relation to culture is supposed to promote a world view of pluralism, multiculturalism and diversity through liberal and unrestricted inter-country connectivity, exchanges and flow of information. But to a majority of the critics, globalization in its current form has turned out to be the spread of capitalism, market economy, hegemonic trade principles, global brands and consumer products of American or Euro-American dispensation. They point out the inherent tendencies in the policies of globalization to foster homogenization of life styles, attitudes and outlooks of people across the board or emergence of a global culture. This type of so-called global culture is epitomized in the

seemingly ubiquitous presence of global brands of consumer goods, MacDonal'd's, Mickey Mouse, fast food chains, shopping malls, retail marts, electronic gadgets, commercial video and English language (generally American English) which have steamrolled and swamped distinctive lifestyles, traditions, language, craft, dress, food, music or in short, local culture of the communities. These scholars say that globalization has been manifested as a type of neo-colonialism perpetuated by the USA and its allies constituting the G-7 group of nations and in the garb of a WTO regime, the economic principles favoring these nations have been thrust upon all others, particularly the developing countries without any scope of resistance for self-reliance. To them, globalization in relation to culture is in fact nothing short of cultural imperialism propagated by Euro-American economic forces and incorporation of their ideological contents into local cultures through manipulation of the mass media. Many people around the world

have, in fact, argued that serious steps are warranted to preserve and strengthen national as well as local cultures as otherwise the diversity and multicultural history which have taken thousands of years to blossom will be wiped out by a monster called globalization.

In fact, in late 1990s, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was considerable and justifiable worry that globalization and Americanization are just two sides of a single coin. The worry was not unreasonable, because it was primarily American-based manufacturers and service providers, American brands and American moviemakers / singers / entertainers / clothing designers / fast-food chains that were in the best positions to take advantage in the new post-cold war situation. They were the first out of the gates and it seemed inevitable and unstoppable that they would take advantage of the flat world to homogenize culture. If you were from another culture, no matter how robust, distinctive and vibrant are your literature, arts, drama, music, ideology, ideas, dress, language, food, craft, you had to worry of being swamped and steamrolled. In the constant struggle between the forces of homogenization and localization or particularization, it seemed that the homogenizing Americanizing forces were destined to triumph. Globalization would have an American face/look/taste. This naturally triggered a backlash against globalization as a form of American cultural imperialism. Many people around the world argued that unless we took serious steps to strengthen cultures and protect the environment – the juggernaut of American globalization could in a few years wipe out the cultural and other diversities that took millions of years of human evolution to produce.

However, a close analysis of the profound changes of our times will reveal that homogeneity and standardization are not the only hallmarks of contemporary globalization. At the beginning of the 21st century, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the world is changing, not just incrementally but also qualitatively. Human societies are moving into a new phase of history. Economic and technological developments are giving rise to cultural diversity, fragmentation and differentiation in the post-modern mass societies. In fact, there are contradictory tendencies within the process of globalization. On the one hand, there is an increasing specialization of power in high-level planning and decision-making and the emergence of a de-facto world government with its own institutions, namely, the IMF, World Bank, G-7, GATT, GATS etc. As Noam Chomsky says, 'these are becoming the governing institutions of a new imperial age.' The forces of such centralization are manifested in the emergence of the global culture as mentioned above. On the other hand, these tendencies have been matched by a revival of localism, local and community distinctiveness, ethnic chauvinism and an increase of xenophobia and nationalism throughout the world.

The astounding progress in Information & Communication Technology (ICT) is making it clear that the globalised and the flattening world has a greater potential to nourish diversity and strengthen local cultures to a degree never seen before. This new potential is due to the remarkable developments in the ICT tools which enable people to upload contents of their culture and creative talents for information of anyone living around the world at real time,

News reports, videos, photographs, encyclopedias, dictionaries, languages, crafts which constitute cultural autonomy, particularity and distinctiveness can be spread in the world by the upload software. One can write own song, create a podcast version in any language and share it with the world on some podcast as well as blogger web site. One can make own home video with a cheap webcam and microphone using software called the Microsoft Movie Maker that comes free with the PC and upload the content for access of others. It's like the Italian Pizza, the flat-world platform allows different cultures to season and flavor it as they like. More than any time before, it now seems no longer inevitable that everyone is going to look, speak, sing, dance and think like an American or European because of globalization. The ICT tools have generated other attributes of globalization to strengthen warm, cozy, thriving local communities, traditions and cultures and make them global. The flattening of world or globalization has broader, deeper and more complex phenomenon involving new forms of communication and innovation. It's about the creation of a global platform for multiple forms of sharing work, knowledge, and entertainment empowering individuals towards more creativity.

In fact, around the year 2000, human civilization entered a whole new era of explosion of technologies. This era is now called the third generation of globalization (Globalization 3.0 by Thomas L. Friedman in his famous book 'The World is Flat'). In this phase, the world is shrinking from a size small (Globalization 2.0) to a size tiny and flattening the playing field at the same time. The uniqueness here is the scope available to individuals to collaborate and

compete globally. The phenomenon that is enabling, empowering and enjoining individuals and groups to go global so easily and so seamlessly is called the flat-world platform. This platform is the product of convergence of the personal computer (enabling people to become author of his or her own content in digital form) with FO cable (enabling access of more and more digital content for next to nothing) with the rise of work flow software (enabling collaboration on that same digital content from anywhere, regardless of distances). This phase of globalization, driven primarily by ICT revolution, is empowering everyone around the globe, enabling anyone or groups to collaborate with any other at individual or at community level at real time. We are indeed witnessing unfolding of the true rainbow of human creativity.

Moreover, even those individuals who have had to uproot themselves from developing countries to go west, to Europe or America in particular, have been able to take advantage of the flattening of the world to hold onto many aspects of their local culture, even if they are living in the midst of a different one thousands of miles away. They can read local newspapers on-line, can communicate with family and friends by phone for almost nothing using voice over the Internet technology, to watch news of own places thanks to satellite TV.

The more people can easily inform themselves in their own languages, the more likely these languages and texts are to survive and the more likely others will write in them and not feel compelled to switch to English. The Search Engines are great flatteners and are enhancing globalization of the local to every corner.

Google is now available in 120 different languages enabling people to inform themselves easily in their own languages or mother tongue.

This is just an instance of not only preservation of local languages but its expansion from local to global. Diversity travels to different corners of the world even without the internet. There is more radio today, more TV, more telephone, more smart phones, more travel, more trade which enable people to thwart the tendency of homogenization. Globalization of the local may, therefore, be called the reverse globalization. The internet, satellite TV, numerous ICT software, facebook, whatsapp, Instagram, podcasters and iPods enable this reversal by globalizing local cultures, art forms, styles, recipes, literature, videos, opinions, customs, languages and so on. It's a new type of Cultural Revolution driven this time from the bottom up. Globalization of the local is manifested in the Diaspora communities around the world who use the global media networks to cling to their local mores, news, traditions and communities, no matter where they are living. The demand for local news, information and respect for cultural traditions is the driving force for such developments. Globalization in Asia does not mean going American or Euro-American from the point of English language and ideologies. The diasporic market means easy access to international newspapers, TV and radio channels which are completely based on local languages. This is globalization of the local where the global may not necessarily come and envelop us but may also make the reverse happen. It has to be admitted that globalization has brought into its fold remarkable and unprecedented concepts and features affecting everything in life and society. Both the structure

and superstructure of a society have been undergoing massive changes in this era of unrestricted liberal connectivity and exchanges among nations.

However, it cannot be denied that there are dangerous pitfalls of the present era of globalization. In short it is rather a type of neo-colonialism of the USA and its allies whereupon, in the garb of a WTO regime, the economic principles favoring these nations have been thrust upon all others, particularly the developing countries without any scope of resistance for self-reliance. The recent policy of USA to impose sanctions on specific countries but also bringing around those countries which trade with them under the purview of economic sanctions reminds us of the era of colonialism. This is violative of international norms and principles of trade and commerce as well as contesting the rights of sovereign nations to do business. Notwithstanding such ugly development, a careful scrutiny of the situation reveals that globalization manifests itself in dangers as well as in opportunities. The growth and pattern of development of economies across countries will show how the opportunities have been embraced by many countries through appropriate restructure and readjustment of national economies in the WTO era and massive penetration of ICT in social and governance institutions to thwart the dangers of neo-colonial designs.

The flat world in the globalised environment empowers the forces of darkness as well as those of light. You can upload homemade pornography, homegrown racism, terrorist ideology of neo-Nazis and al-Qaeda, lies, conspiracy theories and spread them easier, faster and farther on the on-line platform like

whatsapp, facebook, twitter etc.. But the opposite is also happening with much greater strength. Individuals and groups championing in human rights and progressive, democratic, secular and egalitarian ideological characteristics are becoming part of an international community and enjoying solidarity by utilizing the opportunities provided by on-line connectivity. Knowledge and resources are connecting all peoples across the world on a scale never before. ●