

## **CULTURAL IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION AND TECHNOLOGY: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE**

MD. SIRAJUL ISLAM

The world of this 21<sup>st</sup> century is basically an ultra modern in character and it can be considered as a turning point in the annals of mankind. Due to globalization it has made a tremendous change in economic, social, cultural and political spheres that has broken down the barricade of multi-dimensional identity. Broadly, Globalization is often exclusively associated with worldwide economic integration and the emergence of a borderless global market as well as cultural exchange. Today almost every society/nation is influenced by the twin process of globalization from without and localization from within. Global culture which has been emerging today consists of a number of different non-integrated traits - a series of mixed cultural traits and elements and items or habits derived from different and divergent individual cultures. The global culture is not an extended version of the local cultures; rather it is the cultural interaction of the global and the local level. A local culture is the product of face-to-face interaction of members of a distinct society, whereas the global culture is a product of interaction among people of diverse societies living far from each other. As regards the local-global cultural interaction, it is necessary to see how the global cultural flows become locally appropriated, incorporated, syncretized and hybridized. Beside this, globalization also involves sweeping changes on the social, cultural and political terrains of the world. Thus, Globalization entails apparently contradictory processes of, among others, homogenization and universalization on the one hand and localization and differentiation on the other. This article is an attempt to explore the intricate cultural identity crisis in India associated with increasing globalization and technological advancement in the modern age.

### **What is Globalization?**

In general, the term 'globalization' refers to the transformation of temporal and spatial limitations, that is the shrinking of distance due to the dramatic reduction in the time needed to bridge spatial differences in making the world smaller that has resulted in the gradual integration of political, economic and social space a crossing national borders.<sup>1</sup> It is an international platform for maintaining evenness in the living mode of the people all over the world. Globalization is the resultant of the interchange of worldly views, opinions and the various aspects of the culture

everywhere around the world. This is the means for providing the international arena for intermingling of people from different sectors, culture and dialects and learns to move and approach socially without hurting and affecting each others' prestige. In today's era the various means of telecommunication, social media, and most importantly the Internet has a big role to play in the spread of globalization. Globalization has both positive and negative impacts throughout the globe. Right from the positive aspect environmental challenges from the climatic influence, the air, water soil pollution etc. are benefitted to solve these problems, but the negative are basically related to the cyber crime; cultural crisis etc. globalization has a huge contribution to all the ill-effects of scientific advancements.<sup>2</sup> However, globalization has business, trade, and work exposure or the economic and financial status of the country and no field is left behind the reach of globalization Thus Robert J Schreiter says about Globalization- "it is about the increasingly interconnectedness character of the political, economic and social life of the people of this planet".<sup>3</sup> According to some other people that globalization increasing competitiveness among the companies in nationally and internationally to gain maximum profit. <sup>4</sup> In short we can say that globalization is an easy process of international integration of economies and cultures by means of restructuring the mode of production, distribution and consumption of goods and also extended services on global levels in breaking the borders/boundaries. Thus, I think, it is an open invitation to all countries/nations to take part freely in national and international trade as well as cultural exchange. Hence, globalization is not only an economic integration but at the same time it is a process of universalization and comodification of knowledge , technology, communication, culture, health care and a collective initiative for the solution of environmental problems.

Although globalization is often exclusively associated with the economic sphere, however, economic globalization is intractably interwoven with changes within the social, cultural and political spheres. Globalization is furthermore an extremely complex and multifaceted phenomenon. On the one hand there is the tendency towards homogeneity, synchronization, integration, unity and universalism. We have maintained that there is no doubt it has many positive aspects because it has opened the avenue for the development of economy and quality of life too. It provides

more comfort towards the people of the globe and also scientific distribution of foods, goods and promoted cultural exchange. <sup>5</sup> On the other hand, it increases depression to the local industrialist particularly in the minds of the developing countries. The companies of the developed countries are largely benefitted for their good and ultra modern technological mechanism and it becomes an indirect threat to the industries of the developing countries. In this aspect some scholars say that globalization is a process of economic exploitation and capitalist oppression because globalization has tremendous effect on market economy and international biggest companies are largely benefitted by it and the companies of the developing countries are basically dependent upon the powerful companies/ industries for their solvency in losing their respective identities. It is obvious that there is the propensity for localization, heterogeneity, differentiation, and tough competition for the rural industries. These processes are intricately interwoven and represent - in reality - two faces of the same coin. Thus the term “globalizations” is sometimes used to indicate that globalization is not an ubiquitous or uniform process, but involves various terrains, manifests differently in various contexts and has different effects for people in different contexts. <sup>6</sup> It has economic, political, social, cultural and environmental aspects that resulted local and international crisis in these aspects also. Within this fast globalizing world with all its contradictions, crisis for cultural identity have emerged as one of the most striking characteristics of the social, cultural and political scene.

#### **Identity vs. Cultural Identity:**

Before discussing on cultural identity crisis it is pertinent to tell something- what is identity? The term "*identity*" first gained importance through the work of the psychologist Erikson in 1968. While Erikson associates *identity* as a definition of *personhood* with sameness or continuity of the self across time and space, while other authors also emphasizes uniqueness that is those characteristics which differentiate a person from other people or the whole of mankind. Thus, we can define *identity* as the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group that exhibits their continuity and distinctive uniqueness as a whole. One thing we will have to keep in mind that the term *identity* is different from the term *identification*. However, the formation of one's identity occurs through one's identifications with significant others like- parents and

other individuals during one's biographical experiences, and also with "groups" as they are perceived in their lives and deeds.

It is quite evident that in our society there are various types of identities, such as social, psychological, gender basis, cultural etc. and we have already stated about it. This paper is not particularly on *identity* rather, more specifically, it is on the basis of *cultural identity crisis*. Hence, we will lay emphasis upon *Indian cultural identity crisis* in the age of globalization and technology. The description or representation of individual and group identity is a central task for psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists and those of other disciplines where "identity" needs to be mapped and defined. How should one describe the identity of another, in ways which encompass both their idiosyncratic qualities and their group memberships or identifications, both of which can shift according to circumstance? Following on from the work of Kelly, Erikson, Tajfel and others Weinreich's *Identity Structure Analysis* (ISA), is

"a structural representation of the individual's existential experience, in which the relationships between self and other agents are organized in relatively stable structures over time ... with the emphasis on the socio-cultural milieu in which self relates to other agents and institutions"<sup>8</sup>

We know that the cultural study focuses on the origin, history and culture of groups or communities and self identity and cultural identity are not same. *Cultural identity* is basically related to culture of a particular group/ community or nation/state. Its basic nature is a share culture which is effective reciprocally. The term "*cultural identity*" has a twofold interpretation. It is firstly associated with a shared culture, a collective "true self" that is shared among people with a common history and ancestry. Thus *cultural identity* reflects common historical experiences and shared cultural codes that serve to unify and to provide stable, continuous and unchanging frames of reference of meaning amidst social and political changes. Hence, it is well accepted that the *Cultural identity is a collective identity* which reveals the distinctive characteristics of a particular group/community/ nation and which is quite unique in nature also. It is furthermore associated with the exploration of history in order to reveal "*hidden continuities*" and "*hidden roots*". The second view not only emphasizes similarity, but also recognizes points of difference in the course of history in "*what we are*" and "*what we have become*".<sup>9</sup> Thus the second conceptualization

emphasizes cultural identity as an interactive process that involves "becoming" as well as "being" and belongs to the future as well as the past. Although rooted in history, cultural identity undergoes *constant transformation* and is rooted in the present where it provides a framework for the different ways in which people are positioned by and position themselves in relation to present realities and narratives of the past who defines identity in terms of boundaries. Boundaries can be psychologically, culturally, socially or politically defined and include some people as members of a group, while others are simultaneously excluded. According to this perspective, social or cultural identity cannot be understood in terms of fixed categories or unchanging phenotypical or other characteristics and/or cultural practices. Barth perceives identity as a dynamic process in which the characteristics, cultural practices, symbols and traditions of a group might change due to interaction with the physical, social, cultural, economic and political environment. What is important is not the content of a particular identity (characteristics and practices), but rather the existence of boundaries between the own group and other groups. However, as we have already mentioned, the discourse on identity is not restricted to academia. From academic circles it has spread to the centre of social and political events where it is increasingly associated with the social struggles of various dominated or repressed groups such as people of color, racial, ethnic and religious minorities and/or feminist groups<sup>10</sup> These pursuits often labeled as "identity politics" are collective, not merely individual; and public, not only private. They are struggles, not merely groupings. The outcomes are partially determined by power, but power relationships are also changed by these struggles. The struggles involve not only the pursuit of expression and recognition, but also of legitimacy and also power. They furthermore call for a response from other people, groups and organizations (including states).<sup>11</sup> Thus, cultural identity is an interaction between the individual and a group as well.

### **Cultural Globalization**

The effect of globalization largely affected to culture and it can be considered as an initiative to form a one universal culture. Hence, cultural globalization has attracted much attention of philosophers, anthropologists and sociologists. Cultural globalization is a process which can help to create a global culture. Theoretically it is based on the values of multiculturalism and democracy, but practically it is

hegemonic in nature. We have stated earlier that Globalization seeks to promote a world view towards intercultural exchange and promotion of multicultural society with due respect to local and regional cultures. But in practice we have perceived that this cultural aspect of globalization creates tremendous pressure to promote the Western (Euro-American) cultures and to project them as a global culture through the manipulation of mass Medias and other means. The cross-border linkages and peoples' continuous movement across the world strengthen the global ties in the form of ideas, values, fashions and other elements of culture. The idea behind globalization of culture is the creation of a common value, taste and life style. The most basic issue of cultural globalization is whose culture acquires a global spread and whose does not. Within such a context, it is difficult to ignore the issue of cultural imposition and penetration of the developed West. Cultural globalization is actually a more complex process, its strength lies in its apparent invisibility and much of it is hidden. It does not provoke public reaction unless it is politicized – that is politicization of culture and culturalization of politics.<sup>12</sup> Cultural globalization may also be considered as an agent of keeping cultural traditions alive, because increasing access and exposure to media helps in bringing more awareness about cultural diversities and promotion of local cultures. There is an ambiguity in the context of cultural globalization. On the one hand, it advocates for global cultural integration, while on the other hand, the global political scenario is determined and dominated by the notion of cultural and civilizational clashes. Now the most crucial question before us, whether the different cultures and civilizations are integrating together and forming a new global civilization or they are confronting each other for destroying the already existing cultural and civilizational diversities of the globe. Today people all over the world realize the major cultural crisis, whereas the ideas of global peace and inter-cultural and inter-civilizational dialogues are getting far more popularity than the notion of cultural and civilizational clashes. All these issues should be also considered soon. As regards the examination of the process of cultural globalization, the most relevant concepts in anthropology are: acculturation, diffusion and integration. Evolutionistic and relativistic approaches are regarded as the most appropriate anthropological perspectives in examining the process of current cultural globalization.<sup>13</sup>

In the era of cultural globalization the basic concept of culture as particularistic, localized and society specific phenomenon is fast becoming outdated due to the

increasing penetration of external elements of non-integrated traits accumulated through the process of multiple global interactions. The boundaries of culture proved to be quite flexible today. With the increasing process of globalization the concept of culture remains no longer the same as before. Today a culture is neither a closed system nor an integrated whole, nor the internally uniform among the members of a specific society. The very basic notion of culture as its rootedness into a particular geographical territory is being untenable nowadays. In the past people used to be creators and carriers of culture, but today the corporate bodies and mass media have emerged as the powerful creators and carriers of culture. In this connection the study of the relationship between globalization and culture has a great relevance .<sup>14</sup>

#### **Globalization and Cultural Identity Crisis:**

It is evident that the cultural identity crisis started since the last phase of the 20th century and that reflected upon the human experience due to the effect of globalization. In this era of globalization something has gone wrong with the formation of identity in the postmodern age. Whereas past generations seemingly handled cultural identity formation and related problems as well as issues in a matter-of-fact way, new dimensions have been added to old problems. Circumstances in the current world have not only changed the processes of identity of cultural formation, but have also added new dimensions to both personal and collective identity spheres. As we know that the term "identity" implies continuity, and it is a solid basis in which people anchor themselves, the rapid changes that characterizes the age of globalization and technological advancement and eroded most of the bases on which people used to anchor their cultural identity. The age old "problem of identity" has thus changed its shape and content in this era of globalization.<sup>15</sup>

The new centrality of the identity discourse is a reflection of the fact that identity issues are not as simple and straightforward as they used to be. Indeed, the acquiring of identity has become problematic: a task, a struggle, a quest. These struggles are waged on various levels - from the individual to the local to the global. However, the crisis on various levels are closely interconnected and often represents different facets of the various homogenizing and diversifying processes associated with globalization and technological development.

Another factor that plays a role in ethnic identification and the revitalization of ethnicity in the modern world is the globe wide migration associated with

globalization. Appadurai (1993) speaks in this regard of "ethnos capes", that is the worldwide spread of mobile human groups such as tourists, government officials, guest workers, exiles, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The consequence is that the "local space" of many ethnic or cultural groups is becoming more and more heterogeneous, while more people than ever before have contact with a culture or cultures different from their own. According to Featherstone (1990) the term "*multicultural*" should consequently be used instead of "*intercultural*" when referring to the new cultural sphere. One of the consequences of multicultural interaction within local spaces is that the enhanced need for sustaining boundaries between the own group and other groups furthermore fosters ethnic identification and ethnic mobilization.<sup>16</sup>

A further consequence is that many cultures are not restricted to the borders of a single state anymore. The Ethnic Diasporas of globalization have to deal with identity struggles of their own. They have to incorporate the transnational experience of displacement, dis-embeddedness, adaptation to and hybridization with the culture of their host societies in their identities. For many migrants this process of identity formation and reformation is aided to some degree by the availability of the electronic media and information and communication technologies that provide a link to their "home" communities. However, their communities of origin can offer little help in the lived experience of hybridity - the migrant's so-called "double vision" - that often leads to feelings of not belonging to any community or culture and the longing for the recovering of the cultural purity that has been lost.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Cultural Identity Crisis and Indian society:**

Geographically India is a vast and diverse country and various groups of peoples with different racial, ethnic, linguistic, regional, religious, and cultural backgrounds inhabit it. India is known throughout the world for its human and cultural diversity. In the course of its annals India has witnessed a unique cultural synthesis in spite of its incredible diversities. As a result, the structure of Indian society is very complex in nature. The contemporary Indian society and its socio-cultural organization is the outcome of interaction between multiple traditions, customs and habits of India which is unique in character. The mutual coexistence and integration actually helped in generating a unique civilization of this country that has no parallel in the world.<sup>18</sup>



India has never been free from external linkages, hence the forces of globalization has always been operating here. Immigration and migration played a very crucial role in shaping the Indian population as well as its society, culture and civilization. Despite the immense cultural diversities there has been a growing convergence of cultures because of people's adaptive necessities to cope with new forces. Socio-cultural dynamics is a highly complex phenomenon in the Indian context. The changes in the Indian society and culture have been occurring through both the exogenous and endogenous processes. In India the socio-cultural changes under the modern West's impact have significantly started since the last phase of 19<sup>th</sup> century and this have been the most important aspect of the country's socio-cultural dynamics. India has always been a traditional society, however, it is open minded too and it has close contact with the modern Western and American cultures and in this way the process of modernization both technical and cultural have been introduced into the Indian society. Since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century India has also witnessed the powerful forces of current globalization related to science technology and market economy which have made a massive change in its soico-cultural milieu.<sup>19</sup>

From the very beginning of the present era the Shakas, the Huns, the Arabs, the Central Asians, the Portuguese, the French, and other external groups had close contacts with India as regards trade, commerce and other relations. But it is the British and later the Euro-American influence that has made a profound impact on the Indian society. In anthropological and sociological terminology, this change of Indian society is designated as a heterogeneous process of change and which has initiated the contemporary globalization process in the country. In order to examine the socio-cultural dynamics with particular reference to Western and global cultural impacts we must know the very nature and character of Indian culture as well as Western culture. Indian cultural values are highly traditional and spiritual based while the Western cultural values are strongly modern in terms of rationalism, utilitarianism and idealism. It also contains the elements of egalitarianism and universalism, unlike the Indian system which is very much rooted in the values of hierarchy and holism. In the context of change the Western culture follows the idea of historicity, while the Indian culture has the values of both change and continuity. There has been a distinction between 'individualistic' Western cultures versus 'collectivistic' Indian culture,

though it is gradually slackening. In India there has always been a synthesis and accommodation between the two or more distinct cultural traditions instead of contradictions and conflicts between them. Indian traditional institutions like marriage, family, kinship, caste, caste like social groups and above all religions have played a very crucial role in the process of accommodation and adjustment between the traditional local systems and the new global forces. Though they are diversified in nature however, there is a distinctive cultural affinity among them.<sup>20</sup>

When we look at the impacts of cultural globalization on various segments of the Indian society, particularly since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century we observe a very complex picture. Actually, globalization has produced both positive and negative impacts on Indian society. Certainly a part of people is a gainer but the other section is a loser. The Indian elite and middle class have been able to use the opportunities and benefits of globalization, while the country's marginal social groups, for example, tribes, minorities, Dalits, Santals and other tribes are suffer from exclusion, oppression and marginalization. Today the process of globalization makes some Indian peoples more materialistic, pragmatic and money-minded. All this has far reaching consequences in Indian society and culture.<sup>21</sup>

Within the Indian context, the process of cultural globalization demonstrates some unique features. On the one hand, global cultural elements have already made a significant impact among the Indian masses and at the same time several elements and aspects of Indian culture have shown a wider global spread. Traditionally India is not a consumer society rather agricultural based, but in the era of globalization, a powerful consumer class is growing very fast in the country. Its Ayurvedic, Herbal and Handicrafts products are highly popular in world market economy. In India, there has been a great demand of consumer goods among the industrialists, businessmen, rich farmers and growing middle class which together constitutes one third of India's total population. The media, both print and electronic, play a crucial role in spreading a consumer culture among the masses. The younger generation of India today is highly fashion-conscious, and it is the multinational companies and business houses who by means of media for propagating fashion consciousness among them in the form of modelling and fashion shows.<sup>22</sup>

Indian cities and towns are nowadays characterized by the growing number of shopping malls and to visit them for shopping is very common among the affluent

Indians. There has been a significant change in leisure time entertainment. Instead of traditional gossiping, chatting and visiting relatives and friends, people now watch television programs at home or attend clubs and restaurants outside. There has been a strong presence of popular and mass culture in television images and the latter have a profound impact on the day-to-day cultural life of many Indians.

The television programs, particularly the associated advertisements promoted both by national and international channels; actually shape the mindset as well as the behavior pattern of the younger generation. Most of the television images hardly maintain the real quality of Indian traditional cultures, rather they promote sex, violence, pleasure and thrills for the sake of business interest and all these ultimately affect the Indian society, culture and traditions.

Due to the modern technological advancement there is a rapidly growing IT sectors and computer network systems also in India that have given to a sizable part of Indian population the opportunity to make use of internet communication for their needs and aspirations. In fact, the use of internet and cell phones increases day by day. Telephonic conversation, email communication and sending SMS messages, Facebook, WhatsApp interaction gradually have replaced the habit of letter writings of the country's educated/literate people. However, the negative impacts of internet, Facebook and cell phone facilities are also very conspicuous. Cyber crime, relentless pornography business is increasing cultural degradation and social problems of developing India.<sup>23</sup>

There has been a significant change in the sphere of education and knowledge system. The contemporary global epoch is also known as the era of knowledge. But the entire education system is being gradually turned to professionalism and business. Many traditional and classical subjects and humanities courses are now unattractive and outdated. Majority of the students, particularly male students are running after professional education for the sake of job/ employment, money and glamour. Technology and management courses are very popular among the praiseworthy students. Gender and class distinction is quite conspicuous in the educational sphere. One can observe the increasing number of female students in humanities and social science subjects and the boys in technology and management courses. The same way, the professional courses are almost monopolized by the rich and affluent sections. On the other hand, in the field of research the basic and

fundamental works are relegated to the background. While applied and action research get top priorities in educational planning and curricula to cope with the ongoing demands of industrialization and commercialization. Moreover, the privatization of education (like- establishment of numerous private Colleges and universities or educational institutions) system gradually spreads in India and that leads to the emergence of educational business and thereby increasing class distinction in education system in a complex manner. In Health treatments/ facilities, numerous private nursing homes and hospitals are emerged in the society and they are basically business minded rather than the service to the humanity.<sup>24</sup>

In the field of games and sports there has been a significant change. Today due to the forces of global market economy, traditional and local games quickly vanish in India and they are replaced by the most popular money fetching games and sports. Due to various reasons the cricket is considered to be the most popular game among the youths in both rural and urban India. The ongoing growth of tourist industry in India is considered to be the result of globalization. It has both positive as well as negative consequences for the country. As a result Indian traditional games and sports are neglected too. Cultural tourism in one way helps to sustain and propagate traditional culture, but at the same time, the developing tourist industry leads to environmental degradation, sex tourism, trafficking of antiquities and hybridization of local cultures. Those people who live in and around Indian tourist spots are very much influenced by the global tourists' cultures.

The Western style of greetings and exchanging gifts and presents of branded companies with friends, colleagues and relatives is nowadays the most common practice among the upper and middle class Indians. Celebrations of birthday and marriage anniversary and other social events in the western manner are now the most important social functions and gatherings among the rich and affluent strata of India. Some Indian youths, especially the college and University students of urban areas now observe Valentine's Days where exchange of gifts and cards are considered very important to them. The celebration of teachers' day, mothers' day, fathers' day are now very popular, at those occasions presenting gifts is more important rather than emotional feelings and responsibilities. There has been a gradual change in kinship

terminology, particularly among the educated section of India. To use western terms to address the close kin members is now very common in urban India.<sup>25</sup>

India is known for its food diversities, but today fast and junk food is very popular in Indian markets. Noodles, burgers, pizza, chips and other ready-to-eat food are now available very easily. Soft drinks, ice cream and branded chocolates are quite popular among the young generation and all these dominate their food choice. Unhealthy eating habit of junk foods is growing day by day. Actually, globalization has significantly affected the food habits as well as life style of a large number of Indian people. Globalization has increased both spatial and social mobility of the Indians. Consequently, there has been a significant restructuring in Indian joint family system. Traditional marriage practices are also modernized. But all these do not alter the basic character of these important social institutions of the country. Kinship still plays the most vital role in maintaining 'collectivism' of the Indian social life in spite of strong global forces of 'individualism'.<sup>26</sup>

No doubt, globalization also encourages the flow and spread of some Indian cultural elements. The new means of communication empower local communities to cultivate their respective cultural practices for enhancing cultural interaction with the global world. In addition, there grows a number of cultural entrepreneurs in India who undertake marketing and spreading of cultural resources and goods to the external world. As a result, Indian food, herbal products, handicrafts and art objects are available in all corners of the globe. Indian traditional medicine, health care system (yoga), classical songs and music as well as dances are getting a tremendous popularity at the global level. In the contemporary restless world, the Indian philosophy of 'non-violence' and 'peace' is gradually propagating throughout the world. Indian film industries, especially the Bollywood films, have made a significant contribution at the global market of entertainment. Nowadays Indian film actors and actresses as well as the experts in performing arts and other artists are internationally worldwide.<sup>27</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

There is no doubt that globalization has many beneficial aspects that are wholesome to develop our country in scientific, technological sectors but we cannot generalized knowledge of the culture throughout the world and the happening and incidences globally, still the major negative impacts are quite alarming for our

country because our numerous minor cultures became under threat for their survival. Already many minor / tribal cultures and values are vanished from our society and these are irreparable gap in our cultural heritage. Hence, we need to more very cautiously implement its effect so that our cultural identity crisis may be discarded. It is quite evident that our family tie, our age old traditions, habits, ethical values are different from the western/American cultures and due to their pressure in the name of globalization our diversified identities are in danger and that are decreasing day by day. Younger generations are desperate in attitude, lacking in extending service to the aged people, parents are sending to age old homes, society is running towards more mechanical ways and above all our cultural bonds and identities and slackening gradually that is the most dangerous threat in our society. Beside this, many minor cultures are vanished from our society that is irreparable loss of our nation and heritage. Thus, we will have to cautious and alert to make poise with the effect and pressure of globalization and technological development.

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