The Challenges of the Diffused Indian Cultural Matrix in the Era of Globalization: A Gandhian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Gandhiji, also lovingly known as Bapuji or the father of the nation of India, a global proprietor of functional social change is not remembered as a mere leader but honoured as a charismatic figure—the much acclaimed saint of Sabarmati, with selfless service, a futuristic ideology and vision for nation building with scientific spirit and spiritualism [1]. Whereas Marx and Hitler believed in perpetuating change in social system through their western oriented conflict perspective, Gandhiji believed in reconstructing the Indian society through positivism. This paper discusses how his revolutionary ideologies can be implemented to deal with issues and challenges of the distorted Indian cultural milieu in the era of globalization.

Mahatma Gandhi could unlock great truth of his time that has relevance to the contemporary world. While delving deep into his noble and rare insights one can find potential gadgets and tools still lying idle in his old models of workshops and the much sought after key to unlock the truth that India is capable of economic, political and social self sustenance and is not to be dragged, tied to other foreign models-namely-globalization, in its rough sense. He fabricated and designed great models such as “Ahimsa” and “Satyagraha” to reach for the truth-Freedom or Self Reliance or Swaraj! [2,3,4]. The problems of Globalization that he had well predicted before the onset of the process have surfaced in today’s world. A Gandhian perspective would not only help us in analysing the factors, agents, nature and impacts of globalisation, but also in finding a solution so as to carry out the restoration of diffused Indian cultural matrix and nation building [5,6].

Keywords: Basudhaibakutumbakam; consumerism; cultural hegemony; cultural matrix; cultural pluralism; globalization; Satyagraha; social dynamics; Swaraj; virtual colony.

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I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.

~ Mohandas K. Gandhi

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization, Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi, upheld is nothing but the limited version of the Indian concept—“Vasudhaibakutumbakam” (“Vasudhaibakutumbakam”), [7] which means the whole world is a single family. The western world interpreted it in a narrower sense as the essence that is marked by interconnectedness, integration of societies, cultures, economies for which liberalisation and privatization became the key instruments. He detested this odd angle of materialism that is tagged to western interpretation of globalization and held it responsible for the strife and suffering of modern day mankind.

Globalization [8,9], for Gandhiji, is a process of social change that prepares the people of a nation for inter-exchange of ideas, literature and cultural values while keeping intact the ethnic or cultural identity of the concerned. This presents before us a classic sense of being global at mind but being essentially local in deeds. While handling the difficult and almost impossible task of national integration in a country like India that is marked with cultural pluralism [10,11,12,5,6] he always had professed for the assimilation of Hindu, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, Islam, Sikh, Portuguese and Christian culture. He advocated for amalgamation of culture as the process of assimilation and not of cultural dominance that comes with globalization and it’s consequential change. He believed in indigenous ways [13,14,15,16] - reserving and respecting the local and not following the western culture blindly. Being a lawyer by profession and an anti-colonial nationalist by passion Gandhiji, the political ethicist, who employed nonviolent resistance to lead the successful campaign for India’s independence from British Rule, and in turn inspires movements for civil rights and freedom across the world had a dream and vision of Bharat (India) [17,18,19] as a nation rich with cultural heritage that does not need to borrow western trends for development and progress.

Globalization refers to the expanded and intense inter-cultural interaction across societal boundaries. Let us understand, how! To understand the process of globalization one needs to understand the “social statics” that deals with the permanent elements of the core social structure and “social dynamics” [20] that is related to change that occurs more frequently in the outer areas of social structure and sometimes it also touches the core areas. Then lot of problems arise, as the individual is faced with normlessness or anomie [21,22] that is generated out of defunct, corrupt or affected social institutions.

Globalization is a process of change that even penetrates the core Indian social structure thereby making the fundamental socio-cultural system to suffer destabilization. To Yogendra Singh it is a process of change, the causation of which can be heterogenic or exogenous (having an external cause) and the orthogenetic or endogenous (having an internal cause). There is also the need to distinguish between “cultural structure” and “social structure”. Following Redfield, Singh further sub-divided cultural structure into “little and great traditions”. Similarly, the social structure is divided into micro and macro-structures. Trends of globalization should be studied in social and cultural structure.

2. GLOBALIZATION: A PROCESS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Globalization is the process of interaction and integration among people, companies, and governments worldwide. As a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, globalization [23,24] is considered by some as a form of capitalist expansion which entails the integration of local and national economies into a global, unregulated market economy. Theodore Levitt (1980) has pioneered the term and popularized it in the world of business. Since its inception, the concept of globalization has inspired competing definitions and interpretations.

In India, we can very well find it has it’s base only in the socio-economic structure while the cultural structure is left aside to succumb to it’s evil consequences. However, one can analyze and guess the social structure is influenced more by the effects of globalization compared to the cultural structure. Whatever changes are happening in the cultural structure has a serious effect upon the social system as a whole.

The innovative, reformatory ideas of Mahatma Gandhi are useful to check the globalizing trends from spreading and gripping the core cultural
structure. It is quite evident that Indian society [25,26,27] has entered a qualitatively new phase since the introduction of economic reforms in early 1990s, and the current phase of global capitalist development is bound to generate several new cultural challenges for us. This is both due to substantial changes in the social structure of the society and also it's processes. He could well apprehended globalization, in economic sense, is nothing but a hunger of the western mindset for an unstoppable race for materialism-of mechanized mass production, capitalism and consumerism that ends up in dehumanization.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Globalization accompanied by privatization and liberalization is a happening phenomenon in the contemporary world even though Mahatma Gandhi and other social reformers and scientist have often criticised or opposed certain processes associated with it that mars the very cultural structure of India. This paper attempts to investigate the impact of globalization upon the socio-cultural networks of Indian social system, to map the negative effects of globalization [28] as a process of social change that disturbs the Indian social order. The aim of the study is to provide solutions according to Gandhian perspective to find out a way to mitigate it’s harming tenets and to reform the cultural structure in general.

3.1 Functional Interdependence of Economic Globalization and Cultural Globalization

While examining the impacts of globalization, we can see that there are two types of globalization: - economic globalization and cultural globalization.

Economic globalization or introduction of globalization in economic sector has created equivalent changes in the cultural sphere of India. According to Karl Marx change is first registered in the economic sphere (base structure) and then it touches the super-structure (socio-cultural structure) of the society. In India, we find the effects of globalization in the same formats as discussed by Marx. It first hits the economic sphere resulting in the liberalization, and privatization of economy and then the cultural sphere. So, it can be assessed that the Cultural globalization: Which is unacceptable by the social reformers is an outcome of the economic globalization that is very much a welcome to the economist and Indian Government. Moreover, while discussing the “Structural Functionalist Theory”, society is made up of different structures that have “functional interdependence”. So any change in the economic structure is definitely going to introduce simultaneous changes in the cultural perspective. Taking this into consideration, a complex pattern of convergence and divergence of globalizing trends was also seen where both the economic globalization and cultural globalization though being opposites are also found to form a relation of functional interdependence.

3.2 Globalization and Economic Inequality

Incorporating globalization in Indian economy had a distinctive goal. That is to achieve a certain level of economic prosperity. But the contrary is happening. Globalization is creating a strange economic deficit in India. Let us see how:

3.3 Cultural Globalization: Inconsistencies and Challenges

The process of globalization has accelerated substantial change in the social structure without simultaneously bringing about a structural change in Indian society since independence. The effect of globalization has resulted in the strengthening of our outer social structure such as the market, trade and media institutions. This we can call as the “crisis of our success” whereas the scope of the “crisis of our failure” is much broader, as it is marked by our failures in the field of poverty and social injustice. Besides, there is an alarming increase in the rate of normlessness. It has been proved detrimental to the prosperity of the weaker sections of society, such as the Dalit, the women, the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the minorities.

Due to the process of globalization, there arises structural inconsistencies in India, a) Democratization without spread of civic culture (education), b) Bureaucratization without commitment to universalistic norms, c) Rise in media participation without proportionate increase in distributive justice, d) Verbalization of a welfare ideology without its diffusion in social structure and its implementation as a social policy, e) Over-urbanization and g) Modernization without meaningful changes in the stratification system.
The earlier varieties of globalization differ from the current one in the sense that different societies “globalized” differently in the past depending upon their social, economic and political standing. During pre-independence era, [29,30] globalization occurred as cultural encounters between a dominant techno-economic power from abroad and its subject people. But today new challenges that it poses for the humanity can be traced to its unique technological base which has revolutionized the concept and quality of the systems of production, communication, social organization and social interaction.

There is every reason to believe that economic reforms have widened disparity and distress among people. Stagnant agriculture, higher inflation, market recession, increase in the number of casual, marginal and agricultural workers, and higher rates of malnutrition among children -all refer to increasing stress and exclusion in the life of common man. In this context, the Centre informed the Supreme Court that despite a multi-pronged approach to improve income and social security of farmers, over around 12,000 suicides were reported in the agricultural sector every year since 2013 to economic hardship.

3.4 Resistance to Globalization

Gandhiji picked up where everyone had failed to explain – the ideological explanations of globalization. He could sense that it is corrupting the soul of the Indian society damaging its eastern ways and force imposing the western mindset [31,32]. It is like serving curry to a stork in a flat plate in the fox’s venue, which is easier for the fox to lick whereas it is extremely difficult for the stork to grab the food.

The process of globalization is inducing such unwarranted changes in the social structure that weakens and breaks the cultural values and fundamental institutions of the Indian society leaving it in chaos or with a diffused cultural matrix. What takes place now is the dominance of market culture in the era of globalisation and a replacement of most of the traditional way of life and culture in favour of a homogeneous market culture, where culture itself becomes an instrument of global capitalism. The present era is experiencing dehumanization due to excess use of technology. People do not talk to each other face to face. They talk to someone virtual. The development of “virtual community” and shrinking of face to face interaction making people feel unhappy and stressed. Besides, shrinking of primary groups and expansion of secondary groups, breaking down of joint family even nuclear family, single parenting, creation of old age home, crèches, helpless no-play- moron-childhood, privatization of education, sky rocketing divorce rates, trafficking of women & children, increase incidents of gang rape, child abuse, delaying the age of marriage in India and the increment in the associated crime such as honour killing, acid attacks, legalizing LGBT relations, live in relations are happening, as the negative effect of globalization where cultural thresholds found becoming numb to accept the dominance of elements of foreign culture.

3.5 Gandhian Perspective to Deal with the Challenges of Globalization

The same Gandhian principles of “Swadeshi” (self sufficient) and “Swaraj” (self reliance), “village self sufficiency”, can be taken as tools with a new avatar to find out a solution for the hazards of globalization.

Swadeshi Movement: Revival of Domestic Production Process: Gandhiji attempted to transcend the repercussion of globalization by devising a principle called Swadeshi and a method known as “Charkha”. The Swadeshi Movement (1850), part of Indian Independence Movement was an economic strategy aimed at removing the British Empire from power and improving economic conditions in India at local grass root level. Khadi (homespun cotton cloth) and charkha –() the hand spinning wheel, symbolized for him the village economy and it’s self sufficiency [33].

Antyodaya:- Gandhian Principles and Women Empowerment through Self-help Groups: Gandhian concept of socio-economic thought of development Sarvodaya (development of all) through Anyodaya (Compassion for all), [34,35] implying the welfare of all through the weakest of the society is applied as financial opportunities like Microfinance through women Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

Gandhiji’s Idea of Decentralization of Power Resulting in Political Representation of Women in Gram Panchayat is a significant medium of poverty alleviation and empowerment of women.

4. CONCLUSION

To summarize the futuristic Gandhian stand on globalization, one can see that he did not oppose
it completely. He wanted rather a modified and special version of globalization to be activated in Indian society. He insisted that India should not to be a “closed society” and deny progress [36,37]. It should be an “open society” to accept the positive changes that are spread globally. Albert Camus wrote: “Some ideas come into the world as gently as doves. Perhaps then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear, amid the uproar . . . a faint flutter of wings, the gentle stirring of life and hope”. It was Mahatma Gandhi!

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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