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Impact of globalisation on culture of north east India

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Abstract

Globalization, an ever-increasing process, is becoming multifaceted and technically driven due to economic integration with technological and cultural exchanges of the present era. Consequently, the societies of today's world are being hit by these globalization forces. Nor has North East India remained insusceptible to these dynamics. This research paper aims to explore the various dimensions of globalization's impact on the cultural identity of North East India, focusing on the shifts in social, cultural, and economic practices that have occurred due to increased global interconnectedness.

Historically, the region has maintained a sense of isolation, with its distinct communities preserving unique cultural norms, rituals, and traditions. However, in recent decades, North East India has had the rapid infusion of global values, consumerism, and technological advancements, which significantly changed the cultural fabric. Globalization has undoubtedly created economic gains, such as greater access to markets for local handicrafts, textiles, and agricultural products, and enhanced technological innovation and education, but also has raised a concern that indigenous cultures may be being eroded. This duality, the blending of global influences with traditional practices, leads to a complex interaction between cultural preservation and modernity. Often, these two coexist in a contradictory state.

The paper looks at both the positive and negative implications that globalization has on the cultural practices of the region. On the one hand, the economic development avenues opened up due to globalization, access to international markets, and the promotion of local art forms on an international platform. On the other hand, it has led to changes in language use, consumerist values spread, cultural expressions homogenized, and threats to social cohesion, especially in rural areas. The introduction of digital media, westernization, and influence of

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global fashion, music, and cuisine have all altered the traditional way of life and thus created a

generation that struggles between cultural preservation and the forces of modernity.

Moreover, this paper also explores the reshaping of social norms based on globalization,

particularly concerning aspects such as gender roles, religious practices, and relationships

between generations. Globalized content of media has been bringing out changing perceptions

of identity. In turn, this brings out both the strengthening and the weakening of cultural pride

among youth. This paper also examines how communities in North East India are responding

to these challenges through cultural resistance, the promotion of indigenous knowledge

systems, and community-driven initiatives that seek to blend global opportunities with local

values.

In conclusion, while globalization has brought tremendous economic, social, and technological

changes to North East India, its cultural impact is multifaceted. This paper argues that the

challenge for the region lies not in resisting globalization but in finding a balance between

embracing modernity and preserving cultural identity. Through concerted efforts by local

communities, governments, and global institutions, North East India can harness the benefits

of globalization while safeguarding its rich cultural heritage for future generations.

Keywords: Globalization, Culture, North East India, Tradition, Modernity, Social Change,

Identity

Introduction

The North-Eastern Region of India is one large complex in the form of a panaroma

encompassed eight states namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur,

Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura, the homeland for the variety of ethnic tribes some of which

come to the scheduled list as listed within the Indian Constitution, whereas each one owns

individualities with cultural uniqueness in those of its groups. For centuries, the indigenous arts

and cultural practices of the region's tribal and rural populations have flourished as an integral

part of their lifestyle. However, in the context of globalization, culture has increasingly become

a commodified product, which has caused tremendous changes in the cultural landscape of

India, including its North-Eastern states.

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Globalization has already made its mark on the people and cultures of this region, which has

triggered varied responses. While some feel that the mass commercialization of folk cultures

would destroy their specific identities, others see globalization and technological development

as an opportunity to promote and preserve traditional cultural expressions. Despite the

increasing consciousness of the impact of globalization on culture, there is still a dearth of all-

encompassing studies on the impact of globalization on the folk cultures of North-East India.

The current study will be an effort to fill in this gap through a detailed analysis of the cultural

facets of globalization and its consequences on folk traditions of the region. This would help

create a bed for future research in relation to folk culture and globalization in North-East India.

Background of North East India:

North East India is a unique and culturally rich region situated in the northeastern part of India,

characterized by its diversity, distinct cultural identity, and geographical seclusion. The region

comprises eight states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya,

Mizoram, Tripura, and Sikkim—each with its own history, traditions, languages, and

indigenous communities. Often referred to as the "Seven Sisters" (excluding Sikkim), North

East India is bordered by Bhutan, China, Nepal, and Bangladesh, and its strategic location

makes it a cultural crossroads between India and Southeast Asia. The region is home to more

than 200 ethnic groups, each with its own language, customs, and religious practices,

contributing to its immense cultural diversity.

Geographical and Environmental Context:

The geography of North East India is marked by diverse landscapes, including the towering

peaks of the Himalayas in the north and the plains of Assam and the flood-prone areas of the

Brahmaputra River basin. Natural resources abound in the region, including fertile soil, vast

forests, and an abundance of flora and fauna. This environmental diversity has nurtured the

development of distinct agricultural practices, indigenous knowledge systems, and traditional

ways of life, which continue to play a central role in shaping the culture and economy of the

region.

Ethnic and Cultural Diversity:

The cultural mosaic of North East India is influenced by both indigenous and external factors.

The region is comprised of a vast variety of indigenous tribes and communities, each with its

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own language, customs, and rituals. The major ethnic groups are the Bodos, Khasi, Naga, Mizo,

Meitei, and Tripuri, among many other smaller communities. These groups follow different

traditions, such as animism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism, which have contributed to

a syncretic cultural landscape. The region is famous for its unique forms of dance, music,

handicrafts, textiles, and cuisine that reflect the distinctiveness of its indigenous cultures.

Traditionally, North East India was inhabited by tightly knit communities in which social

relationships were based on common practices, rituals, and community functions. Village life

was, often, an extension of common pursuits, including agriculture, hunting, and weaving,

being significant to the local economy. The region's traditional festivals-the Baisakhi of Assam,

the Bihu of Assam, the Hornbill Festival of Nagaland, and the Makar Sankranti-are reflective

of agricultural calendars and local beliefs.

Historical Context:

Historically, the region of North East has been largely isolated from the rest of the country.

This has enabled the preservation of its different cultural practices. However, the strategic

location of this region has also made it the gateway for influences from all the neighboring

countries, including Tibet, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and China. Over time, different cultural,

religious, and political movements from these regions have shaped the region's cultural

identity.

North East India was another region which the British left their marks on. During the colonial

period, this region was an important administrative part of the British Empire. Railways and

roads were built, modern education introduced, and Christianity spread, changing the social

and cultural scenario of the region. Post-independence, North East India saw political

challenges in terms of insurgencies and demands for greater autonomy, which have run

frequently parallel to the yearnings for self-determination that are culturally founded along with

the desire to retain localized identities.

Role of Traditional and Modern Influences: The people of North East India have been able

to carry so much of their culture onto contemporary times, yet so much has changed within a

space of two decades post economic liberalization by New Delhi in the early 1990s. The impact

of global culture has become more intensified with increased connectivity through the internet,

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mobile phones, and social media, and growth in industries such as tourism, trade, and

education. Western fashion, popular music, films, and digital media have become a part of

everyday life, especially for the younger generation. The rise of consumerism and the adoption

of new technologies, such as smartphones and social media, have significantly altered the ways

in which the youth of the region engage with culture and the world at large.

Despite these changes, North East India still maintains a strong cultural sense of pride and

community. Initiatives by many indigenous groups and local organizations have taken steps to

preserve their languages, traditions, and customs. Cultural festivals, local art forms, and the

promotion of indigenous handicrafts are some of the important factors through which the region

strives to present its unique identity against globalization.

The cultural landscape of North East India is dynamic, characterized by the diverse ethnic

groups, historical experiences, and geographical isolation of the region. Despite the challenges

and opportunities globalization has brought to the region, its cultural identity is still strong and

continues to evolve in response to the changing world. The interplay between tradition and

modernity, local customs, and global influences presents both opportunities and risks in

maintaining the cultural richness of the region. Understanding this background is essential for

exploring the impact of globalization on the culture of North East India, as it provides the

context in which cultural changes and adaptations are taking place.

Concepts of Culture and Cultural Diffusion

Culture refers to the customs, traditions, and values that define a society or community. Tylor

(1871) defined culture as "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."

The Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines culture as "the total pattern of

human behavior and its products embodied in speech, action, and artifacts, and dependent upon

man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations." That is,

culture refers to everything learned by humans, from their language, beliefs, rituals, traditions,

social institutions, and knowledge to skills and more, which define the way of life of a society.

The culture is normally passed down from one generation to the next through socialization.

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Folk Culture is defined as the customs and practices formed by local communities, which are

rooted in everyday experiences, customs, and beliefs of ordinary people. Often, this is practiced

by small, homogenous groups of rural residents and passed down through generations.

Examples of folk culture include traditional music, folk songs, storytelling, folk dances, and

customary clothing, jewelry, and foods.

In contrast, Popular Culture (also known as mass culture or pop culture) is typically practiced

by large, heterogeneous groups of people who share certain practices despite individual

differences. Popular culture involves mass-produced, standardized, and often short-lived items,

some of which are viewed as lacking in long-term artistic value. It is primarily focused on

generating profit for large corporations, especially those in the mass media industry. While folk

customs have a tendency to differ with regions, popular customs tend to differ more often in

the same place with time. Furthermore, folk culture is considered more traditional than popular

culture.

Cultural Diffusion: this is the spread of cultural characteristics, thoughts, or innovations from

one culture to another. This occurs due to factors like better transportation, advancement in

technology, and better education. As these factors continue to develop, cultural diffusion is

accelerating. This process can result in either cultural divergence or cultural convergence.

Cultural divergence occurs when different cultural influences cause a region to divide into

distinct parts, while cultural convergence happens when different cultures share ideas and

become more similar. Currently, cultural diffusion is also contributing to global cultural

convergence inasmuch as societies learn more rapidly about one another due to the plethora of

media, including air travel, newspapers, television, telephones, and the internet. Communities

have tended to adopt or adapt cultures that are beneficial to them, thus creating a global culture.

Examples include democratic principles, the use of the English language, technology, global

sports, and even foods and fashion.

Globalization and Culture

The term globalization refers broadly to the growing integration of economic, political, and

socio-cultural systems across different countries. It is a process of increased global

interdependence driven by the exchange of goods, services, capital, technology, and cultural



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interactions. Globalization, therefore, unifies the diverse world into a single interconnected society. With the increasing globalization and technological improvements, economies have not only integrated into themselves, but people and cultures all around the world are becoming involved more regularly in cross-border communication. In this process, cultural layers have added on as a new phenomenon to the existing landscape.

Culture in itself has become a commodity, with the world now emerging as a global cultural marketplace. As put by Baral (2006), globalization cuts across the national borders, cultures, and societies as it has resulted in increasing interdependence and integration and thus development of global culture. Global culture: this refers to how all cultures have been becoming the same and how all consumer and cultural products can be obtained all over the world today. Many international channel operators share their contents and programs across dozens of nations. Multinationals companies McDonald's, Coca-Cola, KFC, Pizza Hut, Nescafé, Sony, and Samsung have distributed their operations on all lands of this globe. All this resulted in people from various countries are able to obtain identical items for consumption almost from everywhere around the world. Globalization, therefore, leads to a common global culture and sometimes at the cost of local and national cultural identities. Critics would say that globalization is also an extension of Western capitalism.

It is seen as an expression of neocolonialism or a continuation of the dominance of Western ideas, values, and economic models over other regions, facilitated by the free-market economy. Smith (2000) asserts that because globalization originated in the West, it is largely Western ideologies, values, and lifestyles that are being promoted across the world. This has resulted in cultural shifts where corporate interests dominate the global economy, and cultural products from rich, powerful nations infiltrate global markets, often putting other cultures at a disadvantage. However, responses to globalization's impact on culture are diverse.

Global culture sometimes blends with local culture to form a hybrid, which is termed as glocalization. Here, global culture tends to follow the local conditions without totally replacing the traditional local culture. According to Jena (2010), globalization may lead to various kinds of cultural changes. Sometimes, the impact of global cultures leads to a more homogenous cultural scenario, which is known as cultural homogenization. Alternatively, globalization incites opposition from local communities leading to a reassertion of local identities, as a way



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of defending one's culture against foreign influences. This reaction is referred to as the cultural clash or identity paradigm. Lastly, the hybridization paradigm advocates for the blending of global and local cultural elements into a more unique form of culture that represents the complexities of both. Global flows of cultures are best represented through his concept of "five scapes" named by Appadurai in the year 1996; the scapes involved are ethnoscapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, and mediascapes.

Movement of people over a territory forms ethnoscape and incorporates various travelers including immigrants, tourists, refugees, etc. This aspect of mobile groups' existence mainly affects the countries politically as well as culturally. Technoscape describes the movement of technology in the global sphere, particularly how the internet and its variants allow fast cultural transfer and exchange. Ideoscape pertains to the diffusion of ideas or ideologies that would change or define the cultures and politics globally. Financescape pertains to the flow of capital, business, and financial networks beyond national boundaries, hence impacting local economies and cultures. Mediascape Lastly, it refers to the diffusion of media content, particularly the growth of digital platforms that produce and distribute information around the globe. According to Appadurai, the interaction between these five scapes results in cultural globalization, creating interconnections and contradictions between cultures. Some critics see global culture as an offshoot of Western or American imperialism.

Sarmela (1975) declares that Western ideologies, political beliefs, scientific achievements, legal systems, social institutions, beauty ideals, moral concepts, and entertainments spread across the world and are practiced all over. The widespread diffusion of Western cultural symbols, such as Levi's, McDonald's, MTV, and Coca-Cola, has led to the assimilation of local cultures into what is often referred to as Americanization—the increasing dominance of American cultural practices and values globally. As Jena (2010) describes, Americanization represents the expanding influence of the United States on cultural norms worldwide, contributing to a form of cultural imperialism. This refers to the domination of industrialized nations, particularly Western countries, over the world's culture and economy. These nations control the way global progress is headed through their economic, technological, and cultural power, define the values of culture, and standardize the cultural environments worldwide. In conclusion, cultural globalization is a complex and multifaceted process. While it promotes cultural exchange and the spread of shared ideas and practices, it also raises important concerns



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about the erosion of local cultural identities and the growing dominance of Western cultural norms. This ongoing transformation highlights the contradictions inherent in globalization, where both the forces of cultural homogenization and resistance to foreign influences coexist, shaping the cultural landscape of the future.

Globalization Impact on North-East Folk Culture in India

Since the 1990s, India has undergone marked growth in cultural diffusion as it liberalized and opened its economy to the global community. These developments have impacted Indian society significantly, both socially and culturally. As observed by Singh (2002), globalization has accelerated the standardization of various cultural forms and practices across India, from lifestyles, food, and fashion, among others. However, he argues that Indian society is inherently built on diversity and pluralism. India's social structure consists of a multiplicity of communities, each with its own cultural autonomy, which has given these groups the resilience to adapt and filter the influences of globalization through localized and flexible forms of adaptation. In addition, these communities show a high sense of self and cultural identity to resist elements of globalization that challenge core values of culture.

Globalization is, therefore, a contradictory force for Indian culture: while it promotes homogeneity in certain areas, on the other hand, it consolidates the role of cultural identity. In the Indian diaspora, we have an amalgamation of traditional Indian cultural forms and global or Western styles, mainly in music, dance, theatre, and cinema. Even though fusion culture has gained popularity, it threatens the very existence of indigenous, local, or ethnic cultural identities. As traditional cultural expressions become commodified and detached from their original communities, they risk losing their vitality and becoming isolated from the lived experiences that once defined them. This shift is not solely a product of globalization, but also a result of the broader modernity paradigm that the world, including India, embraces enthusiastically (Singh, 2002).

The North-Eastern Region of India (NER) is one of the riches in the tapestry of tribal cultures and traditions. Often, the region has been described as a cultural and linguistic mosaic—its diversity, rituals, dances, folklore, and customs make it vibrantly unique (Gahatraj, 2014). In this regard, globalization threatens the indigenous cultures and identities of many ethnic groups



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existing in the region. There is a growing concern about globalization that it will also commodify these traditional cultures at the cost of gradually and silently erasing their distinctness. This is because globalization invariably forces a uniform consumerist culture and value system that is adverse to the traditional, indigenous value systems that these communities want to hold dear. Thus, there is a fear about the reduction of indigenous cultural diversity in NER at the hands of a homogeneous global culture.

The globalized market has already started encroaching on the traditional lifestyles of people in the NER. Cultural influences have shifted over time and the region is going from a Westernised, Americanised ethos towards an increasingly Korean and Japanese culture. This influence is particularly evident in the states of Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland, with widespread popularity of Korean pop culture including, but not limited to K-pop music and fashion. Although some modifications have been brought through this cultural exchange in the culture sphere of the region, other changes have been brought on these traditional customs of local community in various ways. Tourism has also affected indigenous groups in NER, as foreign tourists now have easier access to the region's indigenous cultures. This increased interaction is not always balanced; Western tourists, in particular, tend to view indigenous communities as living relics of the past, often leading to cultural misunderstandings and exploitation. Tourists may perceive themselves as superior to indigenous groups and expect to be served or entertained. Moreover, the high exposure of indigenous cultures to tourists increases the risk of misrepresentation, stereotyping, and loss of intellectual property rights related to indigenous knowledge.

Cultural identity is a vital element for individuals and communities, and it is deeply tied to the culture they belong to. In the case of NER, the search for identity is a pressing issue, marked by emotional significance. But Boro (2006) maintains that identity cannot be something static. It becomes fluid, a thing in constant flow, taking up the aspects of ethnicity, linguistics, and other cultural marks which define community. Identities, therefore cannot remain totally isolated in a globalized world but instead emerge as every community learns with others in a process that involves acculturation and hybridization. This blending of cultural influences results in hybrid identities which reflect both global and local elements.



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Besides questions of identity, it is important to understand the effects of globalization on specific cultural products from the NER, such as indigenous music, textile designs, handicrafts, herbal medicines, and dance forms. Globalization has opened new avenues for folk culture from the region to reach a much wider audience than before. According to Boro (2006) it is an important opportunity that globalization may help the NER promote and showcase its unique products globally, bringing in revenues while gaining international attention; nonetheless, he does address an important concern that with increased globalization, there should be efforts on keeping the cultural heritage of these communities alive. Since every tribe in NER has its own culture, the need for empowering communities to negotiate their rights over folk products becomes very important to ensure that these communities benefit from cultural exchange and trade without being exploited. For this purpose, Boro suggests that there must be a government-controlled monitoring agency that controls trade so that outsiders do not exploit the region's cultural resources for personal gains.

Modern global technology can be very crucial in self-representation of cultures and spreading large information. Global media can be used as a platform for ethnic groups in NER to amplify their voices about their cultures, identities, and challenges that they face. Media provides a platform for communities to narrate their stories and push for the preservation of their cultural heritage. Far from threatening cultural diversity, globalization and technology, when used strategically, can contribute to the popularization and preservation of indigenous cultures. This can be achieved through digital platforms, which allow for the preservation of languages, customs, and traditions. Globalization also brings world-class technology, which can empower indigenous groups to represent themselves, protect their cultural property, and define their collective identity on a global scale.

In the digital age, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and others provide opportunities for ethnic groups in NER to connect with global communities, exchange ideas, and mobilize support for cultural preservation. Social networking also serves as a venue for raising awareness about issues impacting the region's cultural heritage, such as the loss of traditional practices or the commodification of indigenous cultures. Through these media, NER's ethnic groups will connect with international networks that celebrate diversity and will thus lead to the creation of a more empathetic and understanding global community. Such an

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effect will increase international support for tribal cultures and ethnic identities to be protected.

Additionally, international markets for cultural products may create employment opportunities,

improve the local economy, and generate educational opportunities for the communities of the

region.

In conclusion, while globalization presents challenges to the indigenous cultures of India's

North-Eastern Region, it also offers opportunities for the preservation and promotion of

cultural diversity. By harnessing global technology and media platforms, communities can

protect their cultural identities, ensuring that they remain relevant in the modern world without

losing their distinctiveness. Proper management allows globalization to be a source of

empowerment, as the rich cultural heritage of NER is allowed to flourish and is showcased at

the global level.

Conclusion:

The globalization process has affected the culture of North East India in a multifaceted way,

bringing opportunities and challenges to the region. On the one hand, globalization has

provided greater connectivity, economic development, and access to new technologies and

global trends, thereby contributing to the modernization of lifestyles, communication, and

consumption patterns. This exposure to global culture, especially through media, fashion, and

digital platforms, has greatly influenced the younger generations and blended traditional

practices with modern influences. Urbanization, increased mobility, and the emergence of new

industries have also created new spaces for cultural exchange, bringing North East India closer

to the globalized world.

Another threat raised by globalization is against the deterioration of the existing indigenous

cultures, traditions, and tongues. With the growth in supremacy of global consumer culture,

most traditional practices are marginalized or being lost. Loss of identity culturally and

pressures to assimilate according to the norms of a world have become an alarming challenge

in many regions for local indigenous populations. On the one hand, the fast pace of change

questioned whether it is possible to preserve unique local customs, social structures, and values

that have contributed so much to North East India's identity for centuries.



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North East India's response to globalization has been resilient yet adaptive. Local communities and organizations have been actively involved in ensuring the preservation and promotion of these rich cultural heritages with language revitalization programs, hosting cultural festivals, and promoting various traditional arts and crafts. The youth of the region empowered by modern communication technologies took an active role in shaping the boundaries between tradition and modernity to express their identities within a globalized frame.

Concludingly, globalization is impacting North East India's culture through the process of integration as well as resistance. With this aspect, globalization has ushered new dynamics into the making of the region's cultural identity, yet at the same time, it has urged an assertion of the specific traditions, languages, and values of the people of North East India. The future of the region's culture will likely be shaped by a delicate balance between embracing global opportunities and preserving its indigenous heritage. Therefore, as North East India moves forward in a globalized world, it is crucial to recognize and support efforts that foster cultural resilience and ensure the preservation of the region's unique cultural landscape.

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These references encompass a variety of perspectives on the intersection of globalization and culture in North East India, covering topics such as cultural identity, social change, the role of media, economic transformation, and the challenges posed by global influences on indigenous communities. You may want to adjust or expand the references list based on specific sub-topics of your thesis.