

Globalisation, Ethnicity and Cultural Practices: A Case Study of Karimganj District of Assam



Suchitra Das

Assistant Professor,
Dept. of Economics,
Karimganj College,
Karimganj, Assam, India

Abstract

Globalisation is such a term that we are familiar with. This globalization has touched every corner of the society whether it is economic, political, and social and made wide changes in every aspect. Sometimes having positive impact and sometimes the negative one. Globalisation also has brought the outer world to the home which got its impact even in the cultural and value system of the ethnic groups. If we look around we can find so many remix of cultural practices are going on throughout different groups of the people of the society which slowly removing the original cultural practices. The present paper attempts to find out the impact of globalization on the cultural practices of the ethnic people of Karimganj district of Assam. In Karimganj District there are some groups of people who have unique cultural practices in different social events- like marriage ceremony, first rice eating celebration of child, different practices of worshipping God in plants, trees, reptiles etc as well as festivals. With the flow of Globalisation these cultural practices are done in blended mode. Multistage purposive random sampling technique has been used to collect the necessary information. The impact of globalization is seen by the practices of the people on the basis of their awareness level and how far they are interested in practicing. It is found that since with the flow of globalization in the town area through social media education, communication and availability of services younger generation on the town area of Karimganj district as well as of the rural areas are getting less interested in their own cultural foods, clothing and ritual practices. The flow of globalization is found to slowly entering even in the lifestyle of the older generations too.

Keywords: Culture, Ethnicity, Globalisation.

Introduction

Globalization is such a term that we are familiar with. The term globalization is defined in different ways by different people as it is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word 'globalization' first comes into existence in 1930s with the publication of the book named 'Toward New Education'. Initially it referred as the economic transactions & growth of economy and gradually has touched every corner of the society whether it is economic, political, and social and made wide changes in every aspect. The term globalization itself has large number of definitions. It is difficult to say what exactly constitute globalization as it is interpreted by different schools of thought on different matter at different point of time. Roland Robertson states that "globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole, both concreted global interdependence and consciousness of the globe whole". The two sociologists Martin Albrow & Elizabeth King defines globalization as those processes by which the people of the world incorporate into a single world society. Alan L. Mittleman states very comprehensively three aspects of globalization:

1. Globalisation is the intensification of global flow of goods and production factors facilitated by modern transportation and communication.
2. Globalisation is a compression of time and space in a way that events in one part of the world effects on distant locations and
3. Globalisation is a historical structure of material power.

Thus, globalisation brings interchange of views, opinions and the various aspects of the culture everywhere around the world.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

If we travel through history we will find the globalization spread its root with the people travelling to other parts of the world either to explore the new geographical areas, or with the interest to travel new space. All those bringing interchange of ideas of ways of life. Gradually globalization kept its foot in the name of people travelling different parts in the search of job, education etc. Now with the advancement of technology and social media globalization can easily enter into the remotest corner of any society. The impacts of globalization are reflected in economic, political social as well as cultural practices of the people worldwide. This impact is sometimes positive and sometimes the negative one. Impact of globalization is more pronounced in political and economic spheres. But interestingly this economic and political impact of globalization gives birth to cultural impacts also. It is well known to us that as an economic impact of globalisation, it can be seen that many people around the world welcome the globalization of the production and distribution of goods and services as it brings easy access to the products with better quality and cheap price. While others oppose to it as it harms the local industries and farms to grow and displaces the local farmers and destroys the small industries.

With the increase in trade between countries on different cultural products and services like , movies, music, and publications, there arises exposure of all societies to foreign cultures which consequently brings about changes in local cultures, values, and traditions sometimes undermining the own cultural identity. Thus globalization is having a noticeable impact on local cultures. Before exploring the impact of globalization on culture it is also necessary to articulate what generally lies in the domain of culture. According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, the term culture implies the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time. The culture of any group is expressed in the forms of art, music, dance, ritual, religion, cooking, shelter, and clothing, tool usage, mythology, philosophy, literature, social institutions etc.

Homogeneity of world culture as a result of globalization has emerged now which is not equally welcome by all. Cultural issues are often very sensitive as well confusing too. Recently glocalisation has also emerged as the byproduct of globalization. Moreover glocalisation as defined by Roland Robertson (1980), as the simultaneity—the co-presence—of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies has added another impact of globalization. The cultural impacts of globalization has drawn the global attention recently. As stated by Samuel P Huntington the fundamental conflict in the world will not be ideological or political. But the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural.

According to Jeremy Rifkin, "The powers that we have long believed that the world is divided into two spheres of influence: commerce and government. Now organizations representing the cultural sphere—

the environment, species preservation, rurallife, health, food and cuisine, religion, human rights, the family, women's issues, ethnic heritage, the arts and other quality-of-life issues—are pounding on the doors at world economic and political forums and demanding a place at the table. They represent the birth of a new 'civil-society politics' and an antidote to the forces pushing for globalization." David Rothkopf (1997) states that "The homogenizing influences of globalization that are most often condemned by the new nationalists and by cultural romanticists are actually positive; globalization promotes integration and the removal not only of cultural barriers but of many of the negative dimensions of culture. Globalization is a vital step toward both a more stable world and better lives for the people in it." However, Maude Barlow (2001), says "Many societies, particularly indigenous peoples, view culture as their richest heritage, without which they have no roots, history or soul. Its value is other than monetary. To commodify it is to destroy it".

Thus, globalisation has brought the outer world to the home which got its impact in the cultural and value system of the ethnic groups. If we look around we can find so many remix of cultural practices are going on throughout different groups of the people of the society which slowly removing the original cultural practices. The present paper attempts to find out the impact of globalization on the cultural practices particularly in the domain of food, clothing and rituals of the ethnic people of Karimganj district of Assam.

Background of the Study

Karimganj with an area of 1839sq.km is a district in the southern part of Assam. Of the three districts of Barak valley, Karimganj has an international border with Bangladesh in its North West side, Tripura on its southwest, Mizoram in the south and other two districts of Barak valley Cachar and Hailakandi on the eastern side.

Karimganj is situated between longitude 92°15' and 92°35' east and between 24°15' and 24°55' east latitude. The north and north eastern district are plain areas while south and south western parts are covered by dense forests.

Largest number of population of Karimganj i.e. 92.67% resides in the rural areas and their main occupation is agriculture and allied activities. Among these population the Ethnic group belongs to the Sylheti dialect. The Sylheti dialect that is used in Karimganj is known as Barak Sylheti. Notable minority languages include Bishnupriya Manipuri and Meitei. There are also a small tribal communities like Hrangkhoh, Kuki, Khasi, and Sakachep.

Table 1: Overview of the district:

Total population	1003678
Total land area	1089 sq.km
Total rural population	934126
Total urban population	73,747
Sex ratio	944
Literacy rate	55.74

Source: Department of Statistics and Economics, Govt. of Assam 2011

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the present study are:

1. To study the impact of globalization on food practices, clothing pattern and ritual practices of the ethnic people of Karimganj District of Assam.

Data base and Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. To collect the primary data regarding impact of globalization standard questionnaires were used. Multistage purposive random sampling technique has been used to collect the necessary information. In the first stage we have selected two villages under GaonPanchyat and one area under Karimganj Mulicipality to trace the nature of globalization on cultural practices in urban and rural areas. In the second stage amongst 7 AP we have purposively selected 2 AP and from each AP we have purposively selected one village each on the basis of longest distance from district town. Again, one ward has been selected from municipality area of Karimganj town. Finally we have sampled 5% of the households from these two villages and the town area. For time constraint we have confined the study to three cultural practices of the people of Karimganj District which are food practices, clothing pattern and rituals. The data is collected from the Sylheti dialects, who are the ethnic group of Karimganj District. Two age groups were made to collect the data, one age group constitutes ranges from 10-40 (younger generation); 40 and above (older generation). The reason of breaking the age group is to examine how the people in different age groups are more influenced by globalization. The collected data are analysed using simple statistical tools like percentage.

Secondary data are collected from different official publications such as, Department of Statistics and Economics, and also some unpublished sources.

Findings**Food Practices, Clothing, Rituals of Sylheti People and Globalisation**

Food habit constitutes an important part of any culture. Each and every ethnic group all over the world have their own unique food customs. This food customs develops over the ages a particular cultural groups performing their own living patterns. The food customs also develops on the basis of geographical and climatic conditions too. Similarly the food practices of the Sylheti dialect the ethnic group of people of Karimganj district has its unique feature. This

Sylheti dialect has its origin in the Sylheti district of Bangladesh. Karimganj is adjoint to Bangladesh and Sylheti district of Bangladesh. Sylheti came under British rule in 1765 and was made a part of the Dacca division. In 1874, both Sylheti and Cachar were joined with Assam. In 1947, Sylheti became a part of East Pakistan after a referendum, save the sub-division of Karimganj, which remained part of Assam.

The food, clothing and rituals of the Sylheti people of Karimganj District is having its unique feature. In cuisine these people are familiar with rice, fish (both dry and fresh), vegetables collected from jungle like bamboo strips, food prepared in bamboo

shells; in sweet dishes there is practice of using different pithas, preparation of puffed rice with jaggery locally known as 'muriladdo, chiraladdo' etc. Now with the wave of globalization it is found that so many of other dishes are welcomed by this people. As found from the study that present generation is more inclined to outside West dishes, non-Sylheti dishes than the local Sylheti dishes. It can be seen from the table 1 that 60 percent of the urban younger generations and 80 percent of the rural younger generations are aware of the Sylheti dishes but only 42 percent of urban younger generations and 76 percent of the rural younger generations are interested in taking the Sylheti dishes. Whereas more than 80 percent of the older generations are aware as well as interested in Sylheti dishes. The study thus finds that younger generations are more inclined to the non-Sylheti dishes than the older generation. The impact of globalization is seen by the practices of the people on the basis of their awareness level and how far they are interested in practicing. It is found that since with the flow of globalization in the town area through social media education, communication and availability of services younger generation on the town area of Karimganj district are less aware than that of rural areas in respect of different Sylheti foods and are also more interested in the non-Sylheti dishes.

Similarly another two pillars of culture – clothing and rituals also shows the reflection of impact of globalization on it. From the table below it can be seen that the people are also getting inclined towards western outfit than to the local outfits. 67 percent of the younger generations from urban areas are aware of the Sylheti traditional dresses and only 56 percent of them are interested in using the traditional dresses. Whereas the level of awareness and interest in western outfit of the younger generations in urban areas is 89 percent and 90 percent respectively. It is also found that more than 50 percent of younger generations of the rural areas are aware and interested in the western outfits. Regarding the clothing pattern the older generations of the urban and rural areas are still found to be more inclined towards traditional outfits. As 97 percent of the older generations from the urban areas are aware of the traditional dresses and 89 percent are interested in using of it, whereas in the rural areas nearly 98 percent of the older generations puts on traditional outfits.

Regarding rituals it is found that the younger generations of the urban areas are less interested in ritual practices and their awareness level in different ritual practices is also less. Whereas in the rural areas 78 percent of the younger generations are aware of the different ritual practices and 70 percent of them are interested in practicing it. Even the older generations of the urban areas are also less interested in practicing the rituals customs. As seen from the table below that 79 percent of them are aware of the ritual practices and only 75 percent of them are interested in performing such rituals. The reason of less interest in practicing the rituals are the non-participatory of younger generation, nuclear

family, different health problems arising due to etc.
changing life style like diabetics, hypertension, gastric

Table 1: Cultural Practices of Sylheti People (in percentage)

Age Groups Cultural Practices	Younger Generation(10-40)		Older Generation (40 and above)	
	Aware of	Interested in	Aware of	Interested in
Sylheti Food	60(80)	42(76)	80(96)	80(98)
Non Sylheti Food	79(90)	67(89)	76(45)	56(45)
Traditional Dresses	67(77)	56(69)	97(100)	89(98)
Western Dresses	89(56)	90(55)	55(34)	32(20)
Traditional Rituals	20(78)	15(70)	79(98)	75(89)

Source: Sample Survey 2019 *figures in bracket represents rural people

Conclusion

In the conclusion it can said that the flow of globalization has touched every corner and presenting a new cultural system with fusion. Even the rural areas are also not out of the wave of globalization. The flow of globalization is found in the study that it slowly entering even to the older generation too. The present generation though founds interest in their origin but also tries to practice it in their own convenient way. That is glocalisaiton is happening in every cultural practices.

References

- By Maude Barlow,(2001) *Earth Island Journal*
 INCD. (2003). *International network for culture diversity: About*. Retrieved from <http://www.incd.net/about.html>
 Maude Barlow,(2001) "The Global Monoculture,"*Earth Island Journal*. Autumn
 Rothkopf David,(1997) "In Praise of Cultural Imperialism," *Foreign Policy*
 Culture and Globalization
<http://www.globalization101.org>
<http://karimganj.gov.in/frontimpotentdata/census-abstract-2011>
<http://www.assaminfo.com/districts/16/karimganj.htm>