

Understanding the Challenges of Globalization on Indigenous Societies of Assam

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Globalization has affected the lives of human in all the spheres such as social, economic, political and cultural. Globalization has made our lives easier. But at times, it brings certain negative implications on human society as well. The role of globalization in the lives of indigenous people is also very significant. Development of technology and infrastructure and changes in the cultural development has influenced the indigenous way of life. Indigenous people have a very close connection with the environment; therefore, any changes caused to the environment by globalization affects their way of life as well. The objective of this paper is to understand the impact of globalization on indigenous societies. This paper makes an attempt to understand the challenges faced by indigenous population due to globalization. It also tries to find out ways to minimize the challenges posed by globalization upon indigenous people. The paper will be based on secondary sources of data like books, journal and newspaper articles etc.

Keywords- Globalization, Indigenous, Society, Culture, Development, Information and Technology

Methodology:

The methodology used for this study is basically analytical. Secondary sources of data like books, articles, reports published by different departments of the United Nations Organization have been used for writing this article.

Who are the indigenous people?

The term 'indigenous people' is not easy to define. There are difficulties in defining this concept and these difficulties can be assumed from the existence of many definitions and absence of a commonly accepted definition.

Indigenous people are the group of people who have their unique social, political, cultural and economic identification.

Indigenous peoples are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment. They have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Despite their cultural differences, indigenous peoples from around the world share common problems related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples.

The indigenous population occupies only 5% of the global population, but they constitute for 15% of the extreme poor global population.¹ Because of their poor economic status, they lag behind in enjoying 'the benefits of a globalizing economy'.²

World Bank defines indigenous people as "the terms "indigenous peoples", "indigenous ethnic minorities", "tribal groups", and "scheduled tribes" describe social groups with a social and cultural identity distinct from the dominant society that makes them vulnerable to

¹<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples>

²Conference Proceedings, Globalization 's Impact on Indigenous People ' s in Mexico and Bolivia, Cesarotti, Brian, 2009. Accessed from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ae34/24e3d9346c270f4e63b0944d3585057c19a0.pdf?_ga=2.164645183.1425460352.1569662759-1903667896.1568193746

being disadvantaged in the development process. For the purposes of the directive, “indigenous peoples” is the term that will be used to refer to these groups.”³

World Bank also provides some **characteristics** of the indigenous people of different places like

- a) “a close attachment to ancestral territories and to the natural resources in these areas;”
- b) “self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group;”
- c) “an indigenous language, often different from the national language;”
- d) “presence of customary social and political institutions;” and
- e) “Primarily subsistence oriented production.”⁴

Indigenous people are victims of various kinds of discriminations and deprivations. They have been facing human rights violations like “forced relocation from their ancestral lands, pollution and destruction of their waters and territories, no or limited access to education and health care and murder and violence by armed forces” etc. Although these human rights abuses are common for men and women, women are more vulnerable than men to such violations because of their identity as ‘women’. In an already oppressive condition, oppressions and discriminations based on gender creates extra-burden on women. Such forms of violation of human rights are like “forced sterilizations, inadequate reproductive health care, domestic violence”⁵ “*often lacking access to education, health care and ancestral lands, high rates of poverty, sexual abuse, and in some contexts victims of trafficking and suffer from the effects of armed conflict*”⁶

Assam is the meeting ground of a variety of tribes and cultures. The population of Assam according to the census of 2011 is 3,12,05,576 and the population of scheduled tribes (ST) constitute 12.45% of this population, i.e. 3,308,570. The Bodos constitute almost half of the total ST population of Assam i.e. 1361735. Miri (680424), Rabha (296189), Kachari (253344), and Lalung (182663) are the other major STs each having 5 per cent or above of

³ <https://policies.worldbank.org/sites/ppf3/PPFDocuments/090224b0822f89d5.pdf>

⁴ <https://policies.worldbank.org/sites/ppf3/PPFDocuments/090224b0822f89d5.pdf>

⁵ Ellen-Rose Kambel, 2004

⁶ (Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Fourteenth session New York; 2015).

total STs.95.3% of the ST population of Assam is based in rural areas and only 4.7% of the ST population stays in urban areas.

What is globalization?

Globalization means the integration and interdependence among the people of this world in almost all the sectors like, economy, culture, politics and society. It implies connecting the people of all parts of the globe. With the advancement of science and technology people from every nook and corner of the globe has become better connected. With the advent of globalization our world has become a global village. Now people can get the news of any part of the globe within seconds and just with the click of a finger. It has also become extremely easy to get connected with people from any remote part of the world with the arrival of internet facilities.

Globalization in simple terms implies the network of integration among the countries of the world. These integrations can be bilateral or multilateral agreements, multinational corporations, internet connectivity, movement of people across borders and increasing influence of international organisations like International Monetary Fund and World Bank etc.⁷

Globalization has made our lives easier and luxurious. With the development of information and technology sector information about the world has become easily available at the fingertips. Globalization helped in the emergence of liberalized capitalist economies. Liberalization of economy made it easier for the business corporations to work in foreign countries. The flourishing multi-national companies are glaring example of globalization.

Challenges of globalization on Indigenous societies?

The process of globalization is very complex. It has brought in a lot of opportunities for people all over the world. The process of infrastructural development has received a boon. The voice and demands of the rights of indigenous people have reached a momentum in the 21st century. People are becoming more aware about their rights. *“Yet the legacies of*

⁷(Globalization's Impact on Indigenous Peoples in Mexico and Bolivia Brian Cesarotti PLS 315 - Professor Michele Miller-Adams Grand Valley State University)

oppression and the pressures of globalization continue, and inclusion has translated only partially into empowerment.”⁸

Indigenous people are often those in the poorest position to take advantage of the benefits of a globalizing economy and feel marginalized by the process, but they also experience an enhanced ability to communicate globally and increase their voice after centuries of disenfranchisement.

The threats and challenges of globalization included the expansion of state power, economic development, and cultural domination. Likewise in Latin America, North America, and Asia the tribal groups are vulnerable to certain elements of economic development; the construction of infrastructure such as dams and roads by international agencies, resource extraction transnational corporations, loss of collective lands to privatization, and incursions by impoverished neighbours has led to mass displacement due to national development and globalization. In the latter scenario, tribal people are often susceptible to physical abuse police, military, and paramilitary forces enforcing national development plans, protecting transnational projects, or simply executing the orders of local elites.

Indigenous people are seen to have a close relation with land, environment and natural resources. Even there are a number of international laws and declarations regarding the land rights of the indigenous people, their land rights are violated very often. Traditionally they used to inhabit a land and start settlement there as a result they never had any kind of formal document of inheritance of such property. Therefore, they became the easy prey of developmental projects leading to the violation of their rights. Indigenous communities follow matriarchy and matrilineal practices; therefore, loss of land affects the status of women in such societies. Violation of land rights of indigenous women lead to sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking. Loss of livelihood and ill health of the women again influences their role as caregivers and protectors of the local environment.⁹ Land rights of the indigenous people lead to violation of right to food and which ultimately leads to a cycle of poverty.

⁸ (Voice in the Village: Indigenous Peoples Contest Globalization in Bolivia Alison Brysk Professor University of California, Santa Barbara Natasha Bennett PhD Candidate University of California, Santa Barbara)

⁹(Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria TauliCorpuz, UN General Assembly; 2015)

The indigenous population of almost all the parts of the world is dependent on land. The source of livelihood of the indigenous population is agriculture; therefore land is the basis of their life. Globalization has created number of job opportunities, but mostly in the information and technology sector. They are unable to get the benefit of those opportunities, because most of them do not have education.

The challenges of globalization are quite visible in the state of Assam. The culture is the most significant among them. The life style of the people residing in Assam has been affected by globalization. One of the ethnic communities of Assam, the Bodo community has also faced certain challenges of globalization. In the cultural sphere the genre of movies is changing. Earlier the local language movies used to depict the village life of people. But now the background of the movies is cities, not villages. They tend to show more of a urban life style rather than the rural life style. Globalization has also changed the traditional music to a great extent. With the advent of globalization the new generation is more interested in western music, not the traditional music. It does not mean that people do not listen to traditional music at all; they do listen, but only during festivals and on special occasions. The food habit has also been changed. With the advent of globalization western foods are becoming more popular, all thanks to global food chains like McDonalds, KFC, Dominos, Pizza Hut etc. Lots of herbs are used in the cooking of Bodo ethnic foods. They cook their food using very less oil. Most of their dishes are boiled dishes with lots of herbs and jabrang, black pepper and chillies. Likewise, the traditional dress habit of Bodo people has also been challenged.

Conclusion: The United Nations Organization adopted a number of declarations and laws for protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs established a forum named United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) to deal with indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human-rights.¹⁰

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007 is also very significant for identifying the rights of the indigenous people. Along with these the UNO publishes reports from time to time to know about the status of indigenous people regarding enjoyment of their rights. Government as well as non-governmental bodies are also trying to eliminate

¹⁰ (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/unpfii-sessions-2.html>)

different discriminations faced by the indigenous people. But these steps are not enough. This is visible from the frequent instances of violence against indigenous people. The plight of women in this regard is very pejorative. They have to face the double burden of discriminations for being from indigenous community and at the same time for being women. The indigenous people, especially the women have a close relation with the environment and natural resources. This can also be used as a tool to collaborate with the indigenous people for the preservation of environmental resources. Development paradigms undertaken by various agencies should not intervene with the traditional way of life of the indigenous peoples. The existing traditional institutions of indigenous communities should be more women friendly. They have their own ways of organizational mechanisms which have their own significance. Therefore, it needs utmost freedom to flourish their traditional way of life.

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