



Balancing Economic Growth and Cultural Preservation: Navigating the Challenges of Globalization in Nepal

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Abstract

Background: Globalization has significantly influenced political and economic domains worldwide, including Nepal. While it has presented opportunities for economic growth and international integration, it has also raised concerns about inequality, cultural homogenization, and policy dependence. Understanding globalization's theoretical underpinnings and contextualizing its impacts on Nepal can provide a comprehensive perspective on its dual-edged nature. **Objective:** The objective of this study is to examine the interplay between



globalization and Nepal, exploring its theoretical perspectives, economic liberalization journey, positive impacts, and the challenges it poses. The research also seeks to identify pathways for Nepal to leverage globalization while mitigating its adverse effects. **Methods:** This study employs a qualitative approach, synthesizing data from policy documents, economic reports, and scholarly literature. Theoretical frameworks of globalization—including neoliberalism, reformism, progressive radicalism, and traditionalism—are used to analyze Nepal's experience with globalization. Case studies and sectoral data are incorporated to support arguments. **Findings:** Globalization has contributed to Nepal's economic diversification, increased foreign investments, and export market expansion. However, it has also exacerbated issues such as income inequality, labor migration, cultural erosion, and economic dependence. Gendered impacts remain underexplored, and multinational corporations (MNCs) have often undermined local industries. Multilateral organizations and global power dynamics further shape Nepal's vulnerabilities and opportunities. **Conclusion:** While globalization has brought economic and social benefits to Nepal, it also perpetuates structural inequalities and cultural challenges. Emphasizing equitable policies, sustainable practices, and strategic reforms can help Nepal navigate globalization's complexities. Preservation of cultural diversity and enhancing policy autonomy are essential for fostering resilience in an interconnected world. **Novelty:** This study uniquely combines theoretical perspectives on globalization with Nepal's specific economic and social context, offering a balanced analysis of its multifaceted impacts. It highlights the gendered dimensions and the role of multilateral organizations, providing actionable insights for policy reforms tailored to Nepal's unique challenges and strengths.

Keywords: globalization, economy, global power, powerless, cultural hegemony

Introduction

Globalization refers to the increasing interconnectedness of people and places driven by advancements in transportation, communication, and information technology, leading to convergence across political, economic, environmental, and cultural domains (Globalization, 2021). Political development is influenced by numerous factors, with the social and political values of the public being a crucial element. In most countries, public opinion often emphasizes the cultural foundations necessary for democracy, the evolution of democratic elections, and the policy priorities of the populace (Shin & Dalton, 2011). The backlash against globalization is causing turmoil in wealthy industrialized countries, while it is less prominent in developing nations (Rudra et al., 2021).

The Brexit debate sharply divided opinions into two camps: “De-globalization” and “Re-globalization,” each with uncertain outcomes. This discourse quickly spread across Europe and beyond, highlights the unpredictable nature of the global political order (Madarshahi, 2018). Similarly, the Russia-Ukraine war exemplifies the complexities of globalization, revealing the varying fuel dependencies of global powers. The global system is currently facing significant challenges, including the intensification of US-China rivalry, wars in Ukraine and the Middle



East, and the renewed focus on nuclear weapons. These issues have emerged during a period when many international institutions and dominant global order concepts were already under strain due to geopolitics, global capitalism's instabilities, and new social and political mobilization patterns. The complexity of the global order is influenced by the interaction between old dynamics, such as geopolitical rivalry and nationalist self-assertion, and new factors, including technological advancements and scientific knowledge (Hurrell, 2024).

The world has a significant deal of cultural diversity. Nobody can ever get escape from it. The complexity connected to the diversity is inevitable. Despite this complexity, a wide array of global products and services influences our daily lives. Communities are exposed to various cultural customs, along with their associated goods and services. The concept of the world as a "global village" (Levine & McLuhan, 1964) highlights this interconnectedness. Globalization, defined as the global integration of economic, cultural, political, religious, and social systems, facilitates the standardization of cultural expressions through the widespread distribution of commodities and ideas (Watson, 2007). This perspective highlights the extensive reach of globalization in the modern era, aiming to bring the world closer together through diverse forms of trade, transportation, and communication.

Advances in transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, including the rise of the telegraph and its successor, the internet, have been major factors in globalization. These advancements have generated further interdependence of economic and cultural activities (Stever, 1972). This perspective illustrates that the objectives of globalization are to connect people worldwide through technological advancements. The term "globalization" has been increasingly used since the mid-1980s, reflecting the development of robust tools to unify the world by sharing cultures, habits, and fostering integration among various nations. Globalization is the process of international integration arising from the interchange of worldviews, products, ideas, and other aspects of culture (Albrow, 1994).

Above all, a critical question remains: Can globalization benefit everyone? Is it capable of alleviating widespread poverty and hunger? Or is it responsible for the economic collapse of underdeveloped regions? Who is extracting resources and accumulating power? These questions represent some of the most pressing issues we face today. Since the beginning of civilization, globalization has persisted in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), previously referred to as Third World countries. Various scholars and their social theories offer different perspectives on the expansion of global relationships. For instance, liberal economics emphasizes the role of unrestricted market forces amid technological development and deregulation. In contrast, the Marxist political economy focuses on the dynamics of the international capitalist system as the driving force behind globalization (BK, 2008).

Power relations are explicitly present throughout society, originating from various sources (Foucault, 2011). The unequal distribution of power has made disparity a prominent global issue in recent years. Countries with significant economic, political, and military strengths are capable of exercising power over global diplomacy. While power is exercised by all actors, it occurs in varying proportions and dimensions. The rapid pace of industrialization and



modernization has intensified competition among great powers to establish their hegemony worldwide. In the context of globalization, all state societies are becoming increasingly dependent on a global network that neither the United Nations system nor the major powers can fully control (Van Benthem V. Bergh, 1997).

Globalization has introduced numerous challenges, particularly in poorer nations. Examining the history of development, including modernism, westernization, and technological advancement, suggests that the world is moving towards cultural unification. However, this raises the question: Is there any consideration for the nature of diversity? The inherent nature of the world and our development processes often contradict each other. These processes frequently challenge the complex and evolving cultural politics influenced by globalization, using blunt concepts such as ‘Westernization’ or cultural imperialism (Petras, 1993).

Globalization is often perceived as a trend towards cultural homogenization, or ‘globalism.’ However, given the significant political link between culture and economic power, analyzing globalization in a way that fairly represents the poor and powerless remains challenging. The operation of the global capitalist market is particularly tempting due to its connectivity. Globalization signifies accelerated flows and intensified connections across national and other boundaries, encompassing commodities, people, symbols, technology, images, information, and capital. Simultaneously, it also involves disconnections, exclusion, marginalization, and dispossession (Appadurai, 1996; Ferguson, 1999).

Gray (1997) argued that one of the most dangerous aspects of the Western intellectual tradition is the metaphysical belief that local Western values are authoritative for all cultures and people. This perspective seeks to understand the elusive connection of world universalism, which could easily lead to simplistic notions of global homogeneity. However, the concept is much richer, relating more to claims of general applicability and the value of social, political, and cultural understanding, rather than mere uniformity of commodified cultural experiences. It has been regarded as a cultural-political principle aimed at governing the world under the same rules. Globalization has been used as a powerful tool to achieve these goals, suggesting that globalization and universalism share similar objectives. This can be seen as a transformation of a world system with its own laws and rules (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980, 1989).

Globalization has been driven by the cross-border dissemination of global culture, economy, politics, finance, and technology among nations worldwide, including developing countries. Consequently, poorer nations have significantly benefited from globalization in terms of technology, awareness, employment, and economic growth. However, the hegemony of Western countries and their allies has exacerbated the political and economic challenges faced by low-income countries as a result of globalization. This paper explores the political domain of globalization in developing nations, examining both the benefits and the adverse impacts.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the political domain of globalization in developing countries, with a particular focus on poor nations. This study aims to reveal and obtain a deeper understanding of globalization and its socio-political dimensions in the developing world, using Nepal as a case study.



Methodology

This study employs a systematic secondary information collection and analysis approach. This method involves a comprehensive review of existing literature to understand the impact of globalization on developing nations, with a specific focus on Nepal. An exhaustive list of documents and scientific papers related to globalization was meticulously reviewed. The sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, which provided in-depth insights and empirical data on the various dimensions of globalization and its political dynamics. Additionally, reports from national and international agencies offered valuable information on the socio-economic and political impacts of globalization in developing nations, particularly Nepal.

The collected data were analyzed using a descriptive method. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of the existing literature, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The descriptive analysis helped in identifying patterns, trends, and key themes related to globalization and its political dynamics in developing nations. All sources of information were properly cited to maintain academic integrity and avoid plagiarism. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for secondary data analysis, ensuring that all reviewed materials were used responsibly and ethically.

The study is limited by its reliance on secondary data, which may not capture the most recent developments or provide the depth of primary research. However, the extensive review of existing literature provides a robust foundation for understanding the topic.

Discussion

Problem of Developing Countries

There is no evidence to suggest that the 'global era' has brought prosperity, or even an alleviation of human suffering. According to the World Bank, 712 million people (nearly 9% of the world's population) live in extreme poverty, defined as surviving on less than \$2.15 per day (World Bank, 2024). UN World Food Programme estimates that 957 million people across 93 countries are malnourished, the great mass of them living in LMICs.

Globalization's impacts are particularly visible in LMICs, altering the contours of social geography. It is not surprising that globalization has significant implications in areas such as economics, politics, culture, the environment, labor rights, health, and inequality, especially in developing countries (BK, 2008). However, these poorer and less powerful nations are not sufficiently benefiting from globalization. Global markets, production, and consumption are predominantly dominated by elite nations, which use globalization as a tool to expand their dominant markets. Although these elite nations often present globalization as a solution to poverty and hunger in poorer nations, recent economic data suggests that this is merely a deception. In the name of poverty alleviation and lifestyle improvement, what is actually occurring is a sleight-of-hand that disadvantages the developing world.

More than half of the countries do not have enough food to meet the minimum daily caloric requirements for their populations. In some regions, hunger has become more widespread; for example, across Africa, the average household now consumes 25 percent less than in the early



1970s. Between 1995 and 1997, only 21 out of 147 nations recorded per capita growth of over 3 percent per year (Caufield, 1998).

The majority of these examples demonstrate that globalization has not arrived for the poor but rather for the wealthy to maintain their long-term economic dominance. Global economic inequality increased dramatically between 1960 and 1990: in 1960, the wealthiest 20 percent of the world's population received 30 times the income of the poorest 20 percent; by 1997, the richest 20 percent received 74 times as much (UNDP, 1999). By the late 20th century, the world's 200 wealthiest individuals had assets equal to more than the combined income of 41 percent of the world's population; the assets of the three richest people were more than the combined GNP of all least developed countries (UNDP, 1999).

In 2009, the total wealth of the world's richest 380 people was equivalent to the wealth of the poorest half of the population. The richest one percent have accumulated nearly twice as much wealth as the rest of the world combined over the past two years, capturing \$42 trillion since 2020. This concentration of wealth has exacerbated global inequality, with billionaires' fortunes increasing by \$2.7 billion daily, while 1.7 billion workers face inflation outpacing wages. A proposed tax on multi-millionaires and billionaires could raise \$1.7 trillion annually, potentially lifting 2 billion people out of poverty (Oxfam, 2023).

The spread of the manufacturing industry outside the 'triad' networks has been exaggerated, according to recent trends. Despite this, the number of industrial workers worldwide continues to expand. In 1980, the least developed countries and former Eastern Bloc countries combined had 285 million industrial workers; by 1994, this number had increased to 407 million (Moody, 1997). In the African region, the 1990s protests were notable for the high level of participation by organized workers, particularly in South Africa, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. Millions of these employees and their families live in circumstances that exemplify the characteristics of mixed and uneven development.

The roots of capitalism and globalization can be traced back to the 15th and 16th centuries during the Enlightenment and the 17th and 18th centuries during the Industrial Revolution, which saw high mass production, consumption, and capital formation. Slavery has been endemic in world history as a means to expand capitalism, as evidenced by Africa's history. Another major surge in slavery occurred in the 18th century, with around 6,000,000 slaves being transported across the Atlantic and perhaps 700,000 over the Sahara. Over various periods and regions of Africa, well over 10,000,000 Africans were shipped out of the continent as slaves (Lovejoy, 2000).

The relational interconnectedness of globalized capitalism involves processes through which development outcomes in one place are shaped through linkages with other places, and this is often overlooked in North-South relations (Horner, 2019). Globalization brings exciting business opportunities for some, but it also raises significant concerns due to its impact on inequality, environmental degradation, and the dominance of rich countries (Todaro & Smith, 2019). Economic globalization refers to the movement of people, capital, technology, goods, and services around the world, as well as the interdependence of countries, regions, and trading



blocs. It involves the integration of national economies into the international economy through trade in goods and services, direct foreign investment, short-term capital flows, international movements of people, and flows of technology (Perkins et al., 2013). This movement towards the expansion of economic and social ties spreads corporate institutions, technologies, and the capitalist philosophy, leading to a more integrated and interdependent world.

Todaro and Smith (2019) mention that Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus wrote, “Global trade is like a hundred-lane highway crisscrossing the world. If it is a free-for-all highway, with no stop lights, speed limits, size restrictions, or even lane markers, its surface will be taken over by the giant trucks from the world’s most powerful economies.”

Chinese President Xi Jinping addressed the topic of globalization in a speech at Davos in January 2017. He stated, “Some blame economic globalization for the chaos in the world. It has now become the Pandora’s box in the eyes of many. We came to the conclusion that integration into the global economy is a historical trend. It is the big ocean that you cannot escape from.” He proposed a more inclusive form of globalization and encouraged nations to join China’s new international trade project, the “Belt and Road Initiative.”

In the developing world, global economic restructuring raises significant issues related to employment, labor conditions, and poverty. Disparities in global economies have become a crucial political issue in the era of globalization. The LMICs have struggled to function competently in the global market, highlighting the challenges they face in achieving economic stability and growth.

Local culture is replaced by global trends in English language, clothes, accent, and lifestyle as a result of globalization. It also throws off established territorial-collective-identity ties. The rise of non-territorial culture is aided by the expansion of global linkages. Globally broadcast satellite television operas, social media platforms, and other communication tools attempt to modify local culture rather than their own societal entity.

Another facet of globalization is life-threatening infections like Covid-19. Modern transportation facilities made it possible for diseases to spread quickly over the world as a result of globalization. In 2019, Covid-19 was discovered in Wuhan of China (WHO, 2021) and swiftly became a global health threat, with the entire world now dealing with the consequences. Emerging economies, such as China and India, are experiencing rapid growth primarily fueled by fossil energy sources. These nations, driven by the need to sustain their economic momentum, exhibit minimal inclination towards reducing emissions. This reluctance stems from the perceived trade-off between economic growth and environmental sustainability. Consequently, their continued reliance on fossil fuels exacerbates the global climate crisis. In stark contrast, poorer countries, which have historically contributed insignificantly to the climate crisis, find themselves disproportionately vulnerable to its adverse effects. This vulnerability is largely due to their limited resources and inadequate adaptation strategies, which hinder their ability to cope with climate-induced challenges.

In the complex dynamics of climate struggles and power relations, developing countries bear the brunt of global climate change impacts. These nations, already grappling with socio-



economic challenges, face heightened risks from climate change, including extreme weather events, food insecurity, and health crises. Nepal, for instance, has a negligible contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions. With a population that constitutes less than 0.4% of the world's total, Nepal is responsible for only about 0.027% of annual greenhouse gas emissions (Bhusal, 2021). Despite this minimal contribution, Nepal is highly susceptible to the impacts of climate change, such as glacial melting, erratic rainfall patterns, and increased frequency of natural disasters.

Moreover, Nepal's unique geostrategic position does not shield it from the realities of international aid dynamics. While foreign aid is crucial for Nepal's development and climate resilience efforts, it often comes with strings attached, reflecting the self-interests of donor countries. This reality highlights the importance of Nepal maintaining robust diplomatic relations with its neighbors, as well as with global powers and allies across the world. Such relationships are essential not only for securing aid but also for fostering cooperation in addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. Therefore, Nepal's strategy must encompass a balanced approach to international relations, ensuring that it leverages global partnerships while advocating for fair and equitable climate action.

Politics and Globalization

For a long time, globalization has been considered a political domain. In general, four political perspectives can be distinguished: neoliberalism, reformism, progressive radicalism, and traditionalism. However, many scholars combine or vary between them in practice. Since the rise of neoliberal economic theories in the late 1970s, notions of an expanding free market energized by unfettered capital movement have dominated approaches to the world economy and development theory. Complemented by the idea of a "New World Order" in which, after the death of communism, capitalism advances under U.S. guidance, globalization theory has become a celebration of liberal capitalism. It generally also includes the belief that freely adopted market mechanisms are the optimal way of organizing all exchanges of goods and services (Friedman, 1962; 1980). Whether globalization is new or not, or how new, is much debated. Deregulated global financial markets linked in real time, declining transport and communications costs, and increasingly significant multilateral institutions and agreements are clearly major changes during the 1980s and 1990s (UNDP, 1999; McMichael, 2000).

The core assumptions underlying globalization challenge the principles and rationale of the world system. Globalization theory does not merely describe a significantly changed world; rather, it imposes neoliberal economic principles on an inherently unequal and disordered system, reflecting the desires of contemporary bourgeois society. This theory is utilized by alter-globalization activists, within political debates, and as a scientific term by some academic researchers. It refers to a radicalized form of capitalism characterized by deregulation, restricted state intervention, opposition to collectivism, a new role for the state, and an extreme emphasis on individual responsibility. Anthropologists describe deregulation, the freeing up of capital, the rush to profit, new communication and manufacturing technologies, and the increase in economic and cultural flows and media growth as central elements to worldwide



distribution. Some authors argue that education plays a crucial role in spreading neoliberalism (Shore, 2008; Shore, 2009; Wright, 1990).

It is certainly true that the internationalization of capital has accelerated over the past decades, steering the system in a direction different from that envisaged by globalizers. A key response to the fall in the rate of profit has been increased speculative activity and a significant growth in financial markets. This shift has not complemented the growth of productive capital globally but has diverted investible funds away from it, reducing the likelihood of new centers of capital accumulation emerging. Additionally, decisions by multinational companies (MNCs) to develop manufacturing on a global basis have further influenced this trend. Many reformers advocate for government intervention to protect workers, the poor, and the environment from the negative consequences of unfettered globalization. Progressive radicals reject the structural foundations of contemporary globalization and aim to reconstruct the process on a different basis. Traditionalists, on the other hand, have advocated for de-globalization through various means, including ultra-nationalism, religious revivalism, and different forms of environmentalism.

Politics and Globalization

Theoretical Perspectives on Globalization

Globalization has long been a contested political domain with four prominent perspectives: neoliberalism, reformism, progressive radicalism, and traditionalism. While these frameworks provide theoretical underpinnings, many scholars often blend these perspectives in practice. Since the rise of neoliberal economic theories in the late 1970s, free market expansion and capital liberalization have dominated world economy and development theory. This was reinforced by notions of a “New World Order” after the decline of communism, promoting capitalism under U.S. guidance.

The neoliberal approach celebrates liberal capitalism, favoring deregulation, minimal state intervention, and market mechanisms as the optimal mode for economic exchanges (Friedman, 1962; 1980). However, globalization theory is not just descriptive; it imposes neoliberal principles on an unequal world system, often reflecting the desires of dominant capitalist societies. While deregulated financial markets, declining transport and communication costs, and multilateral agreements were hallmarks of the 1980s and 1990s (UNDP, 1999; McMichael, 2000), critics argue that these changes deepen existing inequalities. Anthropologists highlight deregulation, profit-driven motives, and cultural flows as central elements of globalization, raising concerns about its societal impacts.

Critiques of Neoliberalism

Neoliberal globalization is criticized for perpetuating inequalities and undermining collectivism. Progressive radicals seek to reconstruct globalization, emphasizing equity and sustainability. Reformists advocate for government intervention to address adverse effects, while traditionalists push for de-globalization, often rooted in nationalism or environmentalism. Education, as Shore (2008; 2009) and Wright (1990) argue, plays a pivotal role in spreading neoliberal ideologies, further embedding systemic inequalities.



Globalization and Nepal

Nepal's Economic Liberalization

Following the restoration of democracy in the 1990s, Nepal embraced globalization through economic liberalization. Key reforms, such as the Industrial Enterprise Act (1992) and the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act (1992), encouraged private and foreign investments. Nepal also joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), and other international bodies. Agreements like Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) and Double Taxation Treaties (DTTs) with countries such as India, France, and China further integrated Nepal into the global economy.

Multilateral organizations like the World Bank, IMF, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) played crucial roles in monetary policy formulation and providing grants. Nepal's participation in global trade has led to significant developments, such as remittance inflows from 189 countries (NRB, 2019) and the export of Nepali coffee to diverse markets, including Japan and Europe (NCPA, 2021). Conglomerates like the Chaudhary Group exemplify Nepal's global economic engagements with investments in over 50 countries (Himalayan Tribune, 2021).

Positive Impacts of Globalization in Nepal

Globalization has advanced liberal democracy in Nepal, fostering awareness of governance, human rights, and popular participation. Sustainable development programs have improved living standards, contributing to economic growth and social well-being. In the 2023/24 fiscal year, foreign direct investment (FDI) surged, with 402 international companies pledging NPR 61.78 billion. These investments are projected to generate nearly 20,000 new jobs, reflecting economic optimism.

Nepal's integration into global trade has bolstered industries such as coffee exportation and garment manufacturing. Increasing firm registrations in recent years indicate an expanding industrial base, promising further employment opportunities. While challenges remain, globalization has created pathways for economic diversification and international collaboration.

Demerits of Globalization in Nepal

Despite its benefits, globalization has exacerbated challenges such as income inequality and economic dependence. Transit disruptions, like the Indian blockade, highlight vulnerabilities in supply chains (Pant, 2018). Dominance by multinational corporations (MNCs) often stifles local businesses, leading to trade deficits and reliance on foreign aid, which undermines Nepal's policy autonomy (Gurung et al., 2018).

Labor migration, while boosting remittances, has resulted in brain drain, depleting Nepal of skilled professionals (Bhardwaj & Sharma, 2023). Organized crime, including human trafficking and money laundering, has increased, eroding social stability (Basu & Cordella, 2018). Gendered impacts of globalization, particularly on marginalized women and girls, remain under-addressed, with global power dynamics influencing vulnerability assessments and response systems (Policek, 2020).



Cultural homogenization and Western ideals, propagated through media and consumer goods, threaten Nepal's cultural heritage and national identity (Betz & Hein, 2023). Moreover, the profit-driven motives of MNCs often result in resource extraction with minimal long-term benefits for host nations (Bista, 2017). Addressing these issues requires robust policies to balance globalization's advantages with protective measures for local industries and communities.

Conclusion

Globalization, while heralded as a pathway to development, often perpetuates inequalities favoring dominant nations and institutions. For Nepal, the challenge lies in navigating this global framework to maximize benefits while safeguarding its sovereignty and cultural identity. Emphasis should be placed on equitable policies, local knowledge, and sustainable practices. Global powers must reconsider their approach, prioritizing global welfare over militarization and resource extraction. By redirecting resources towards addressing hunger, poverty, and malnutrition, a more equitable world order can emerge. For Nepal, fostering resilience through strategic reforms and preserving its cultural diversity will be key to thriving in an increasingly interconnected world.

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