

Understanding the Matrix of Globalization

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My Research on Globalization

I was attracted to the study of globalization around 1995. Being an analyst of global politics and international relations, I found it more and more difficult to conceptualize the future, because its horizon was then much less visible beyond the walls of the present. The previous World Order had collapsed around us. The only thing I knew about the future for sure was that it would be quite different from the present. The core assumptions in international relations theory were found wanting in understanding the just-emerging structure of the global order. The so-called "realist" internationalist theorists had assumed that the most potent threat to global order and security invariably emanates from other states rather than from a changing relationship between states and non-state actors. This was obvious in the context of Russia and East Europe, which was the core area of my academic and research interests then.

I was thus pinned down by the agonizing question: What was the road to the future? And then it gradually dawned on me that the key word of the future was "globalization." I arrived at the conclusion that one important reason for the collapse of the Soviet Union was its anti-globalist behaviour/politics. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and its internal and external empire, the biggest opponent of globalization disappeared.

It was still difficult to foresee the new emerging era of world politics and global economy. Nevertheless, it was clear that the New World Order (NWO) would not be so organized and regulated as was the Old World Order (OWO). The OWO was based on "pacted peace" within and between the alliance systems. And it rested on the concept of military security and was quantified in megatons of nuclear destruction power or in numbers of warheads and missiles. It was then becoming clear that the NOW would have to be based on the concept of the widest meaning of economic, political, and cultural-communicational security in an uncertain global order. There were, however, clear signs that American efforts to create a unipolar world were gathering momentum over a "global globalization," in which the world system and its institutions operate in concert. Over the years, the United States (along with other Northern States) have indeed exerted political, economic, and cultural hegemony to control the process of international-global integration and interdependence. The major threat for security and stability is seen to emanate from the "nature of things," namely from the inherent economic and political problems of the Southern States, marginalized by globalization. Consequently, multiple backlashes have occurred in the Global South.

This brings me to the obvious question of how to define globalization? While economists take a somewhat narrow view of globalization, and tend to cast it as a largely economic phenomenon, those belonging to other disciplines disagree. In my earlier research, I took a broader view in defining globalization as *transnational flows of capital, technology, information, ideas, labour, goods, or culture*. On the surface, globalization seeks to convey the message of universalism and growing interconnectivity among the people of the world. This interconnectedness is not merely economic, but

covers a wide range of political, social, and cultural developments. The linkages invariably surface below the level of states. Obviously, the countries and regions which enjoy easy access to the flows of globalization deploy them to a host of benefits. And, of course, the worst-off are those who are by-passed by these flows, and thus experience deep socio-economic distress. This view also emerges in the writings of David Held and Anthony McGrew (see, for example, Held et al 1999).

Later, working on a joint publication project with Paul James, Tom Nairn, and others, we arrived at the conclusion that there are a "multitude of definitions that do not work." We posit, instead, that globalization should be simply defined as the "process of extending a matrix of...world space. Globalization is the extension of social practices across world space, where the notion of 'world space' is itself defined in historically variable terms...Globalization is thus a layered and uneven process, changing in its form, rather than able to be defined as a specific condition as a concept like globality implies. The concept 'world space' is thus very important to the definition." We argue further that globalization and empire are "related extensions across space of general patterns of social practice...In these terms globalization does not have a logic of its own, any more than imperialism does" (James and Nairn 2006, xxx).

The events of 11 September 2001 loom as a "defining moment in history." It dissolved the core myth that security is lodged in protecting our borders and raised many issues pertaining to transnational conflict, violence, and globalization. This became rapidly an area deserving greater attention, analysis, and research. For over a year, I pursued it with great interest with my Australian colleague, Paul James.

Transnational conflict is a "phenomenon that relates to tensions over sovereignty, equity and identity associated with the globalization of violence in the context of a global system of nations and nation states" (James and Sharma 2006, viii). For a long time, processes of globalization have generalized the consequences and patterns of most political violence, including that between states. Moving away from that generalization, we tried to focus on certain forms of conflict and tension, such as violent conflict, ranging from the violence of globalizing terrorism, as it moves across borders, to the more systematic violence of contemporary regimes.

The question that begs an answer is what are the sources of violent conflict in the existing global order? What is the changing nature of violent conflict in relation to the effects of globalization? The term "transnational" has come into vogue to pinpoint the process of interchange that could not be adequately explained within the category of "nation-states." From this standpoint, the context of "transnational conflict" refers not so much to the conflict between nation states as to the conflict that either flows across nation-state borders, or challenges the sovereign control of these nation-states. It denotes a specific phenomenon, which is not the same as the general concept of "globalizing conflict" and "transborder conflict." The concept of transnational conflict seeks to impart historical and social specificity to a form of violence that has become predominant in the last two decades. This, however, does not imply that the nation-state is fading away, or the form of conflict is totally deterritorialized.

It needs, perhaps, to be emphasized that there exists a broad link between globalization and conflicts. This link has to be viewed as a generalized one between globalization, inequality, and conflict, including transnational conflict, based on the argument that social disruption is invariably associated with increasing tension and conflict. Obviously, this does not mean that globalization directly causes violence.

In light of the above, how do we conceptualize the existing scenario, which is expanding day by day?

What are the main sources of conflict in the existing globalizing order? What is the changing nature of conflict and violence in relation to the effects of globalization? The underlying implication in asking such questions is to identify the sources of insecurity and understand the structure of different forms of conflict. The picture that is drawn is of a frighteningly violent world, with violence taking many forms and reaching deep into the life worlds of people. The point to be noted is that in most cases tensions and strife are related to the negative impact of a globally-patterned and inappropriate model of modernization and development on peoples' life worlds. The changing domestic environment is characterized by dislocations caused by globally connected forms of economic development and an associated undermining of traditional culture, beliefs, and practices.

Lastly, I now turn another area of my research related to globalization — that is, globalization as a microcosm of inequality and exclusivity in the Global South and more particularly in South Asia. In fact, it is an extension of what was discussed above. The notion of nation-building and welfare state is either under retreat or being recast under the influence of globalization. The interface between a globalizing corporate economy and the so called New World Order, engulfing major regions and states in the Global South, provides the new setting of the nation-state, which is in fact "under siege" and trying to hide this fact, while permitting multiple backlashes. Caught in a critical dilemma, Rajani Kothari writes, the "nation state is producing deep vacuums all over the place" (*Economic and Political Weekly* (Mumbai), 26 March 1995). The demands of globalization have led the ruling political elites to step back from the transformative trusts. The model of marginalization, exclusion, and dispensability of the weak and poor has emerged from the shifts of ideology that hegemonic globalization has engendered. Globalization as a "power discourse is very different from universalism as a normative discourse" (Ian Gough, 2004).

Globalization Studies in India

By and large, it is the economic community in India which has focused more on the pressing problems related to globalization. The issues that have merited greatest attention include growing structural and other inequality, unemployment, the rural-urban divide, the decline of agriculture leading to acute and widespread socio-economic discontent, the lowering of old welfare safety nets, and economic and human insecurity which can lead to social and political upheavals. Exclusivity is a huge social, political, and economic challenge.

Writing in the *Economic Times* (9 July 2007) Chetan Ahya concluded: "we believe that the social pressure arising from widening inequality has increased in the past few years, driven by globalization and the rise of capitalism." He attributes the "rising social challenge" to "the rise in inequality." He also finds that "the inequality gap in wealth is even starker...Our analysis indicates an increase in wealth of over \$1trillion (over 100 P.C. of G.D.P) in the last four years, and the bulk of this gain has been concentrated within a small segment of the population." He rightly argues that this is an open invitation to social and political upheavals.

P. Sainath, one of the leading analysts of rural India, declares that "rural India is a shambles." He argues that as a result of globalization, "the public investment in agriculture shrank to nothing a long time ago... The government tells us over 112000 farmers have committed suicide since 1993. A gross underestimate, but the figure is indeed bad" (*The Hindu* (New Delhi), 9 August 2007) Deepak Nayar and Julius Court argue that "some of these problems are a direct consequence of globalization" (2002, vi).

Outside the economic community, there are only a handful of historians and political scientists who

have done some serious thinking and research on issues related to globalization. Prof. Rajni Kothari, a political scientist, is an intellectual leader in the discourse of globalization. And there is growing interest in globalization in the fields of international politics and international relations. During my tenure as Dean of the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), I was able to gather a small group of younger colleagues to work on research areas related to globalization. A few courses on globalization were introduced at the post-graduate level. Areas we earmarked for serious research were: globalization and domestic conflicts; globalization, violent conflicts, and peace-building; and globalization and human security.

Areas for Collaborative Research

All three of the above mentioned areas would be of great interest for systematic collaboration with institutions and colleagues outside of India. For example, a study on globalization and domestic conflict might seek to profile the rise of such conflict and its changing character, with reference to coalition building among nation-states. In doing so, it could analyze the impact of globalization on domestic conflict at the following levels:

- * globalization as a source of domestic conflict
- * globalization as shaping domestic contradictions thereby escalating conflicts
- * globalization transforming the nature of these conflicts

Such analyses might be undertaken in relation to the following parameters and in the context of specific global regions or areas:

- * the erosion of the authority and legitimacy of nation-states and their autonomous policy-making capacity in coping with domestic conflict
- * cross-border flows and the changing profile of local discontent and movements associated with it
- * support from global civil society in empowering these movements and their influence on the protest agenda and the nature of domestic conflict
- * the impact of cultural homogenization on cultural and ethnic identity movements

Likewise, the theme of globalization, violent conflict, and peace-building might be analyzed from various regional perspectives. The idea would be to address fundamental questions such as specific linkages between states/regions and global processes, changing levels of intensity of global flows, and the empirical linkages between such flows and conflict. With the theme of globalization and human insecurity, a key focus might involve examining the local-global context of a range of politics and communities under threat across the "arch of insecurity." This range of politics and communities under threat would span so-called "failing states" and those experiencing the aftermath of widespread violence or war.

Indian Thinking on Globalization

There are two sets of divergent perceptions among analysts of globalization in India. Globalization as process or phenomenon is thus embroiled in the controversy generated by these polarized points of view. The first point of view is defined mainly in terms of the dominance of a neo-liberal market fundamentalist doctrine, emphasizing unrestrained, deregulated liberalization and privatization of economic and social services. As one might expect, the conceptual discourse is focused on economic globalization. The emphasis is on studying the widening of international linkages and interactions in trade, financial flows, and investments. Implied is a goal of restructuring the orientation of economic policy so as to integrate India with the West. This is supposed to lead India on a path of economic growth and well-being.

Under the influence of this strand of thinking, economic reforms were inaugurated in India in 1991, which have succeeded beyond expectations. The growth rate has reached a firm floor of 8 percent, and peaks of 9 percent have been achieved and seem sustainable in the future.

The second point of view holds that although globalization has a strong economic logic, it is largely a political and cultural phenomenon. It accentuates a host of inequities, increases disparities in wealth and power, and reflects the increasing contradiction between capital and labour. More fundamentally, the logic of globalization brings about momentous changes at the bottom tiers of nations and civil societies. The new nexus of finance, trade, and technology drastically alters not only the structure of relations between states, but also the nature of the capitalist order in which the masses will be willy-nilly asked to find a place for themselves. The global order is seen to be largely shifting gears; the relationships of dominance and dependence are moving away from the geopolitical and are becoming mainly technocratic.

Obstacles to Globalization Studies Research

The principal obstacle to research on globalization in India is the absence of an institutional framework in the sense that there is no specialized centre or institute dealing with multi-layered research on globalization. While there are commendable research studies on macro issues related to globalization, there are hardly any in-depth empirical studies of these issues nor are there many micro-studies of several relevant and interconnected issues.

A second obstacle is that it is widely assumed that globalization research is the domain of economists, and it should be left to them to pursue. Inputs from other disciplines are rare, although scholars of international politics and area studies have recently turned to globalization to understand the complexity and dynamics of global politics and its impact in different areas of the world.

Lastly, there is very little institutional financial support to researchers working in this area. While economists still manage to have their research projects funded, others are not so fortunate.

Indeed cross-national research collaboration will go a long way in generating and sustaining meaningful research on a host of interrelated issues in the field of globalization. Effort should be directed at promoting specialized empirical research on mutually selected research areas and questions.

Reflections on Appadurai

Arjun Appadurai's (2000) formulations are undoubtedly very pertinent. However, these have been known to many of us for quite some time. Perhaps, the only difference is that he has done it with greater and commendable lucidity and boldness.

His so-called "double apartheid" is closely related to the entrenched "domain assumptions" which guide our research. Most research questions are indeed complex and these can not be answered adequately within the framework of given domain assumptions, which invariably seek to hide underlying values. Several decades ago, Gunnar Myrdal (1969) pointed out that researchers' attending values should be put on the table at the very outset. Myrdal reiterates this in his monumental works *Asian Drama. An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (1968) and *The Challenge of World Poverty. A World Anti-poverty Programme in Outline* (1976). The research is bound to be misleading if his or her underlying political, economic, or cultural values are not exposed to fuller

view. The discourse on globalization is thus increasingly becoming a dialogue of the deaf, and for the deaf.

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