

## **CULTURE CLASH IN MARGINALIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION: A STUDY IN CONTEMPORARY KERALA SCENARIO**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Culture is very much with the notion of power which paves way for the hierarchical structuring of cultures. Power refers to how certain cultures maintain privilege over the 'other'. At a secondary level it refers to choices related to personal matters like which movie to watch, which confectionary to eat in. The word 'Culture' with the capital 'C' referred to the elite way of living and their beliefs. What we have today is 'culture' with the small 'c', a term which is applied worldwide irrespective of all differences. The main agenda of Cultural Studies as a discipline is to dismantle the hierarchical impulses within culture and to negate binaries such as 'high culture' and 'low culture'.

Narrowed down to Kerala scenario, the culture is inimitable and fascinating in many ways. Cultural heritage of Kerala goes way back to ancient times and its contribution to literature, music and arts of Indian heritage is unique and exemplary. The peculiar geographical features of the state has contributed to the 'Malayali culture' with a flavor of its own, even though it forms part of the Indian and Dravidian culture. Isolation of Kerala from the other parts of India by Western Ghats has helped Kerala to retain its cultural heritage almost to its original form.

Kerala is a melting pot, where several ethnic and religious groups mingle. The historic process of cultural synthesis happened in Kerala is brilliantly reflected in its art forms, traditional rituals and sacred practices. The typical icons of Kerala throw light into the subtle and intricate details of the state; unfolding the beautiful blend of cultures owned by different religions and communities.

**KEYWORDS:** Culture Clash, Kerala Scenario

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Concept of Globalization**

Globalization involves economic integration; the transfer of policies across borders; the transmission of knowledge; cultural stability; the reproduction, relations, and discourses of power; it is a global process, a concept, a revolution, and "an establishment of the global market free from socio-political control." It is a concept that has been defined variously over the years, with some connotations referring to progress, development and stability, integration and cooperation, and others referring to regression, colonialism, and destabilization. According to Immanuel Wallerstein 'globalization represents the triumph of a capitalist world economy tied together by a global division of labour'. Martin Khor defines 'globalization is what we in the Third World have for several centuries called colonization.' Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan and Gérard Stoudmann defines globalization is "a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and trans-cultural integration of human and non-human activities."

Three key institutions helped shape the current era of globalization: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Globalization process is linked to the following major factors

- Expansion of markets worldwide followed by close integration unlike the past.
- Revolution in the process of transportation, communication and technology
- Heavy flow of trans-national and cross-national migration on changing the profile of nation states
- Shifts in cultural pattern impacting upon all communities and
- Decline in the conventional role of nation states and increased presence of NGOs

This paper focuses on the impact of globalization on the state of Kerala, a study in Cultural Studies framework to see how far globalization contributes to the marginalization of the deprived class in Kerala. The Marginalised in the socio political sense of the term includes women, dalits and such deprived sects in society. In such a parlance of discussion social inequality comes as a major point of discussion. The caste system did not exist in ancient Kerala society. It was an innovation introduced by the Aryans who came here from outside. It was during the later Sangam period that there was rudimentary beginning of social stratification. A major function of the caste system was to sort people into categories of status and wealth in a highly unequal way and then to provide social and religious justification to the inequality. A look into the contemporary social structure of Kerala reveals the struggle of Kerala's lowest caste people against the bias and indignities imposed by caste hierarchy and for social, economic and political rights that led to the spontaneous protests and formation of associations. It is the role of social reformers and associations that helped in building up a free and democratic set up based on equality, justice and dignity of the individual.

The social structure is vividly pictured in the cultural products like film and fiction of the globalised era in Kerala. As realistic fiction, Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* contains imitations of reality that reflect particular cultural norms of people living in Kerala, where most of the story takes place. Real places represented in the novel include the village of Ayemenem, the city of Kottayam, and the site of the Taj Garden Retreat at Kumarakom. However, the fictionalised representations of people and places in the novel are not history, for they are not designed to adhere to a standard of accuracy but, instead, to evoke sympathy for characters who resist conventional social practices of modern Kerala culture. A few minor characters resist modernization by adhering to traditional, status-marked social roles such as servant or kathakali dancer, but the major characters resist by rebelling against the social status quo, which includes Communist party politics, psychological Anglophilia, and castism. Roy's narrative advocates an ideology of individualism partly by shaping the facts of social history, partly by describing characters as individuals with physical bodies, and partly by employing an individualistic style of writing that draws on the language resources of both English and Malayalam. The result is a work of art that represents the culture of Kerala in a fictionalised context in order to hold that culture up for critical examination.

As it is seen in the fictional framework of Roy, the cast ridden structure of Kerala society is a topic of discussion in any academic scenario. This is in stark contrast, perhaps, to the situation some twenty-five years back, when the idea that Kerala had overcome caste hierarchies through the twin strategies of social development and political mobilization was still hegemonic. In other words, the official position of the dominant left, articulated for instance, by the leading Malayalee communist leader and intellectual, EMS Namboodiripad, in response to the economist P Sivanandan's critique

of the Kerala Model in 1977, was the reigning wisdom in Kerala in the 1980s and even into much of 1990s. Responding to Sivanandan's critique that the extension of social development through the strategy of expanding the reach of the infrastructural state had not lessened caste inequalities (1976:4), EMS argued that significant dismantling of caste had occurred, which Sivanandan had overlooked. Essentially, he made two claims. One, caste hierarchies in Kerala had loosened considerably due to the operation of capitalist forces and reservations in education and government employment for the lower castes, and hence occupational hierarchies had been dismantled considerably. Secondly, the situation of the ex-untouchable groups was better in Kerala compared to elsewhere, because the strong presence of the left had weakened caste disabilities and created "an organized working class", consisting of trade unions and associations in which people working for common political goals beyond specific caste interests<sup>1</sup>. He continued: "While Kerala has the unenviable reputation of being more caste-ridden than any other part of India it happens to be the one state where the largest number of people have been organized in these unions or associations, which cut across all considerations of caste and community. The political parties of a left character too are stronger here than in most other parts of the country." (1976: 67)

This cast based culture is the result of political, social and economic inequalities in Kerala. The plight of tribals (indigenous people) in the context of globalization and liberalization cannot be neglected in this kind of an academic discussion. The tribals are children of nature and their lifestyles are conditioned by the Ecosystem. India, with a variety of Eco-system, presents a varied tribal population throughout its length and breadth. India is also characterized by having second largest tribal (Adivasis) population in the world. The impact of globalization on the Indigenous communities is manifold, and often they are ones most negatively affected. Under globalization, it is the tribal Indigenous areas that have had to face the attacks of massive developmental projects. It can be argued that deprivation of land and forests are the worst forms of oppression that these people experience. The Constitution of India makes special provisions for socio-economic and educational development of these groups. It is also a fact that pre-independent and post independent governments in our state could not and did not do much for the development of the scheduled groups. It is seen that after the sixty years of formation of the state tribals continue as one of the most marginalized community within the state, the post globalized developmental projects and developmental dreams of the state has again made the deprivation of the tribals of Kerala and the developmental divide has increased between the tribal and non-tribal in the state. Despite government initiatives, the existing socio-economic profile of the tribal communities is low compared to the mainstream population. The instruments of globalization have not rendered positive impact in achieving intended objectives social security to the indigenous people.

The post-millennium decade in Kerala has been marked by the rise of intense struggles for land by Dalits and tribals. As C K Janu (2011) remarks, these were already happening in Wayanad and Idukki, two districts where tribal communities were a presence, since the late 1980s right upto 2000; as Rekha Raj's interviews with Dalit women activists reveal, land struggles by the Kerala Harijan Federation were happening steadily through the 1970s and 80s. However, the Adivasi Ekopana Samiti led by C K Janu took these issues to the capital city in 2001, agitating in front of the Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram, putting up huts in protest against the denial of productive land to the Adivasis. Radical Dalit groups participated in the 48-day-long agitation and after intense protest and equally charged negotiation, in 2001, Adivasi families were promised five acres of land each by the Congress-led State government. The Adivasi Gotra Sabha was formed in the wake of this agitation. However, the government went back on its promises, and when reports of starvation deaths among tribal communities began to appear, in 2003, the Adivasi Gotra Sabha attempted to build huts in the

Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary, which, Janu claims, was originally tribal land, common lands of tribal communities (Janu 2011). In these struggles, activists resisted repeated attempts by the government to treat them as passive recipients of welfare, members of a government category. As Janu recalls, at the start of the Muthanga agitation, the government announced a month's free rations for participants, and went on to increase it to four months' rations. The activists refused the offer, pressing for productive land (Janu 2011: 442). The Muthanga agitation was suppressed by the government with considerable violence inflicted on leaders and activists alike, and by the police and 'civil society' in Wayanad (Bijoy and Raviraman 2003). In the Chengara land struggle (2007-09) organized by the Sadhujana Vimochana Munnani led by Laha Gopalan, the failure of the land reforms to redistribute land classified as plantation land came into bold relief. Beginning with some 300 families that entered the Harrisons Malayalam Plantations (the 99-year-lease of the company on this land had expired in 1996, but it continued to hold on to the land) in 2007, landless people began to gather, and in two months, the numbers rose to 7000 families.

Despite all these deprivation the self reliance these communities show cannot be negated. Tribal communities living close to nature over the years have acquired a unique knowledge about the use of ecological resources. Tribal societies, throughout the world, have their respective systems of medicines. Any study in this field open up a line of enquiry into the multifaceted dimensions of tribal medical practice and traditional knowledge system with a view to understand and document the culture and practice of tribal medical lore.

The social and cultural implications of widening economic inequalities, crisscrossing contemporary struggles for welfare and justice, have contributed heavily to the shaping of critical Dalit politics in the present. As mentioned earlier, Dalits, tribals, and coastal communities were recognized early enough as deserving welfare endowments and the paternal care of the state. In the dominant Kerala Model literature, these groups figure as 'outliers', that is to say, those social groups, which have relatively poor access to social development -- mainly to education, health, and the chances for upward mobility these promise (for instance, in Kurian 2000). They are marginal mainly in the economic sense, in other words, they inhabit the 'waiting room' of development. 'Outliers' apparently share in the dominant ideas of the good life, justice, and community; what they are seen to lack are the economic resources and the social and intellectual capital to achieve these. They are, however, the 'acceptable' outcasts, upon whom the elite constantly exercise their pastoral authority. Their oppression, rights, 'voices', and redemption are unendingly discussed in elite circles, though such discussion rarely moves beyond the terms of debate set by the state, elite intellectuals, or technocrats. Deprivation, then, defines their condition as marginal

Consumer culture, the pervasive by-product of globalization is another major point that is to be discussed in the present study. We should make an ethnographic gaze into the consumption patterns, styles and modalities of the people of Kerala in the ambit of consumer culture and thereby undertakes a cultural analysis of the effects of globalization on Kerala society. Consumer capitalism and postmodernism have become one with the phenomenon of globalization and its wider socio-political implications are stunning to the social activists. This contribute to the potential for class conflict in Kerala society with consumer-conflict wherein individuals and groups in opposite poles struggle for conspicuous consumption in the battle field of consumer culture.

Indian economy is to be put into discussion table in such scenario. Indian economy, its foreign trade and how the era of free trade, since the advent of WTO, has affected India – all are to be grave concern these days. The impact of

opening up of the world market on Kerala is to be problematized from the points of view of expansion in exports and imports of goods and services from and to Kerala. Kerala has abundant products in the category of traditional goods like spices, marine products, cashew, coffee, rubber etc. Its share of manufactured products is very little except perhaps for a few items like fertilizers. Kochi Port, which is the second largest port in India, is positioned to make a good contribution to the development of trade from Kerala. One conclusion emerges clearly: Kerala's human resources export (millions of people serving in foreign countries) is significant and the software industry demands attention for development in the future. Instead of producing mere software technicians for employment outside India, Kerala should be a magnet for high tech research and development for global corporations in the world.

The new figure of the globally-oriented Kerala consumer is fashioned in and through specific images of consumer agency. Recent scholarship on advertising, television, and film in India have highlighted the ways in which globalizing capital operates through the production of specific and various sites of consumer desire and agency, marked by caste, region, community, age, gender, and class. A key figure in this articulation of global capital with specific sites of consumer agency is the young and modern female.

In the globalised Kerala the marginalization of women is still a debatable point in cultural studies. In “God’s Own Country” –the gulf between men and women were always so pronounced. India as a whole has considered women as a property to be collected and stacked in the corner of the house. She was always to remain in the house taking care of her husband or her owner and his children. This palpable difference – which is part of Kerala and all of India - had compelled many women to come forward and prove their worth and talents -not for comparison, but for the betterment of Kerala, and India as a whole. Some women who broke their silence faced serious consequences. This did not deter the future generation from going forwards. They kept proving their worth. . The position of women in the Indian society has been a very complicated one. In fact, it could not be an exaggeration to say that the recent changes in the status of women in India is not a sign of progress but it is really a recapturing of the position that they held in the early Vedic period.

Yet, the status of women who constitute almost half of the Indian population is not that encouraging. Gender based violence – including rape, domestic violence, mutilation, murder and sexual abuse- is a profound health problem for women across the globe. Nonetheless, it is not considered as a public problem of serious concern. Today, Kerala is one among the few states in India who has learned to reckon with this force and has allowed them to advance in some area. They are still in the process of evolving and affirming their seal of approval.

As a permeating feature of globalization, a simultaneous grow of womenfolk in ideology cannot be negated. Women’s literary writing in Kerala has gained a fairly wide market. Even as younger women authors have succeeded in breaking earlier stereotypes and frameworks of depiction, the category of ‘pennezhuthu’ has come to be questioned as a defining term that limits, instead of enabling. Incisive feminist critiques of contemporary patriarchy now draw upon a variety of disciplines, with the result that long held notions defining Malayalee womanhood are being questioned with increasing regularity. Concomitantly, stereotyped frameworks and the pulls of the market continue to exercise a powerful influence. It makes it all the more necessary to foster independent initiatives in feminist knowledge generation in Kerala.

## CONCLUSIONS

The process of globalization has negatively affected the lives across the globe, but the people who have affected by this was the indigenous communities everywhere, it was worsely affected the lives of Dalits, Adivasis, other backward populations and women in Kerala and they were the people who had to pay the price for so called celebrated post - liberalized economic growth of the state.

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