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# Globalization and Cultural Homogenization: A Case Study of Iran

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ADITI KUMARI<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*For most of the years since independence, India was reluctant to enter into globalised world freely since it wanted to protect the Indian economy. However, then in the upcoming years with the advent of globalization and internet, the concept of cultural assimilation has increased. This has significantly impacted our own cultural belief systems in various aspects, be it economically or psychologically. This has led to a situation of identity crisis and cultural confusion, backed by the resistance towards domestic culture. The main agents that led to this cultural homogenization is global media and cultural industries; global brands and the evolving consumer culture and the cultural exchange that takes place by way of trade and investments and immigrants. Furthermore, the paper seeks to study the effect of globalization on the Iranian culture, how the culture has been impacted and the way forward for the same. This research work seeks to analyse the strategies to balance cultural exchange and preservation in the ambit of globalisation by reducing the adverse effects of cultural homogenization and encourage cultural diversity.*

**Keywords:** Globalization, Cultural Homogenization, Iran.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Though the concept ‘Globalisation’ was there since early 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the emergence of world-wide trade and the discovery of new land and sea routes by various travellers<sup>2</sup>, still it can be said to be formally developed in 1983 by German-born American economist Theodore Levitt, in his article titled ‘*The Globalisation of Markets*’.<sup>3</sup> According to him, ‘Globalisation’ is an interaction that changes things, rather than leaving them the same.<sup>4</sup>

Anthony Giddens, in his book *The Consequences of Modernity* considered ‘Globalisation’ to be creating such inter-country relationships that one can never remain unaffected by the

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<sup>1</sup> Author is a LLM student at GNLU, India.

<sup>2</sup>ResearchGate, Globalisation and Cultural Homogenization, e-PG Pathshala, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351468631\\_Globalisation\\_and\\_Cultural\\_Homogenization\\_e-PG\\_Pathshala](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351468631_Globalisation_and_Cultural_Homogenization_e-PG_Pathshala) (last visited Sept. 2, 2024).

<sup>3</sup>Volle, A. Globalization. *Encyclopedia Britannica* (June 10, 2024), <https://www.britannica.com/money/globalization>.

<sup>4</sup>Abdelal, Rawi, & Richard S. Tedlow. *Theodore Levitt's "The Globalization of Markets": An Evaluation After Two Decades*. SSRN, 26 Feb. 2003, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=383242](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=383242)

significant other.<sup>5</sup>

‘Globalisation’ seeks to incorporate the people universally into a single world society, as viewed by Martin Albrow.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, ‘Globalisation’ is defined as the fact that different cultures and economic systems around the world are becoming connected and similar to each other because of the influence of large multinational companies and improved communication.<sup>7</sup>

As per IMF, ‘Globalisation’ is a concept that mainly deals with integration of economies through movement of goods, services and capital across the borders. It focused more towards innovation and technological progress by studying various cultural, political and environmental dimensions across the nations.<sup>8</sup>

Also as per UNESCO, ‘Globalisation’ is primarily dominated by economic, financial and market principles, while the socio-political phenomenon being the secondary concern. Going as per this definition, the concept of globalisation has not truly remained a universal phenomenon and has more so turned into a matter of convenience where only the dominant countries are being benefitted in one way or the other. This seeks to create an imbalance in the development of all the countries as it undermines the initial incentive of globalisation of growth of all nations mutually.<sup>9</sup>

As understood above, globalisation has been understood differently by different scholars and institutions, however the main essence remaining the same.

The term ‘culture’ has been derived from the Latin verb ‘colere’ which means to cultivate, nurture, cherish and to grow. Culture in a specific community can be attributed to its certain characteristics like language, customs, specific religious beliefs, art and literature, music and dance forms, cuisine, clothing and fashion, work culture, recent technology and innovations, and specific governmental policies.

This process of globalisation has helped in cultural exchanges among various countries. This has broadened the scope of diverse cultural practices and also increases the awareness about

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<sup>5</sup>Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>Martin Albrow & Elizabeth King, *Globalization, Knowledge and Society* (London: Sage, 1990).

<sup>7</sup>Oxford University Press, Globalization, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/globalization> (last visited Aug. 29, 2024).

<sup>8</sup>International Monetary Fund, Globalization: A Brief Overview (May 30, 2008), <https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2008/053008.htm>.

<sup>9</sup>UNESCO. (2000). *UNESCO in a globalizing world*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000119581>.

various popular and even niche practices. However, such a cultural diversity should not undermine the traditional values of the other country. It has been further understood how specific country's culture is being affected by the significant other in such a way that it is no longer possible to revive the prototype of that culture.

The term 'homogenization' is the idea of things becoming or being the same. It can be understood as the conscious and subconscious act of forming a copy of the other.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, the concept of 'Cultural homogenization' can be understood as transformation into or adoption of another cultural characteristics consciously or subconsciously by the large mass of people. It is considered to have certain unfavourable implications on the aspects of globalisation as it reduces the scope of diversity and overshadows the cultural growth of the host country. It also reduces cultural authenticity of the nation and just seems to be the counterfeit of the dominant nation's values and norms. It is a kind of parasite that sucks the growth of host nation in the name of development and globalisation.

The concept of globalisation is more of a kind of give and take, however now it has become more of a nature of take and take as the home country generally is developed and it do not let any other country to affect it sovereignty. While on the other hand, host country is generally on the developing phase and is more prone to be influenced by the culture of the other nations.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### (A) Globalization and Cultural Homogenization: Conceptualizing the Relationship

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 'Culture' is defined as the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group<sup>11</sup>

As discussed above, globalisation has resulted in increased interconnectivity and inter-dependence and has played a major role in connecting various different countries around the globe. It has resulted in exchange of various research and technological aspects along with the socio-cultural beliefs.

Since earlier times, the main aim of inter-connectivity between the nations has been to prosper and grow through the exchange of wealth and knowledge. Apart from the economic wealth, however, the more enhancement has been there in the culture of the nations involving in trade

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<sup>10</sup> ResearchGate, Globalisation and Cultural Homogenization, e-PG Pathshala, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351468631\\_Globalisation\\_and\\_Cultural\\_Homogenization\\_e-PG\\_Pathshala](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351468631_Globalisation_and_Cultural_Homogenization_e-PG_Pathshala) (last visited Sept. 2, 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/culture\\_1](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/culture_1) (last visited Aug. 29, 2024)

relations along with each other. This has resulted into significant cultural exchange among the countries globally. Such a process has resulted into more of a kind of similarity of cultures across different societies which can simply be understood as homogenization in one word.

With this assumption, one can safely say that with the advent of globalisation, no country has remained the same and no culture has remained the same. It can be construed in both positive and negative manner that the specific country's culture is continuously evolving and on the other hand, it can be said that no culture has remained completely authentic due to such a practice of continuous cultural exchange.

### **(B) Cultural Diversity and Identity**

Cultural Identity can be identified from the two levels, where one being the state and the other being the individual. It can also be understood in a manner that a person being born in a foreign nation can still adopt the values of his family along with that of the nation in which he is living. This is like being influenced by both the external surroundings of the individual and the internal psychological processes that are being influenced by the person's social group which ultimately frames the attitudes, cognitions and emotions of the person.

For more specific understanding, I would like to introduce the readers towards a term '*Biculturalism*' which can be referred to an individual with a cultural identity composed of one's heritage culture; and the culture of the country in which he/she has settled or was born in. This concept also applies to individuals who have migrated and are living in such geographical reasons having high ethnic concentration. Such a behaviour in an individual can be identified by looking at his/her perspectives, values and the language spoken.<sup>12</sup>

This also introduces '*intragroup marginalization*', which can be understood as perceived interpersonal distancing by members of the heritage culture when an individual displays cultural characteristics of the dominant group. This perception can be considered as a form of rejection of the individual's heritage culture by the members of that group due to the non-compliance to the prescribed values and expectations. This can cause interpersonal conflicts regarding one's own identity.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, it can be safely presumed that having more than one cultural identity can have both advantages and disadvantages. Firstly, it introduces towards a lot of different cultures and increases the general public notions and insights about why a particular practice is being

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<sup>12</sup> Imane Bouymaj & Renato Telo de Freitas Barbosa Pereira, *Homogenization or Diversification? The Impact of Globalization on Cultural Identity of the First and Second-Generation Immigrants*, 13 J. Globalization Stud. 73 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.30884/jogs/2022.01.06>

<sup>13</sup> Id 75.

followed, the idea behind it and how it can contribute towards encouraging the overall socio-economic growth of a country possessing that specific culture. With the increased knowledge, it also increases the tolerance towards people of other ethnic values and cooperation among all. While on the other hand, it may arise the feeling of animosity towards the other cultural values. It really takes a rational human being to accept the values of all cultures and even inculcate them in daily life.

### **(C) Impact of Cultural Homogenization**

It has both positive and negative effects on the current cultural value system across the globe.

In *favourable* view of globalisation on cultural identification, it has made the access to the worldwide information easy and has reduce the formation of pre-conceived opinions about the cultures other than the domestic ones. People are becoming more aware about not just of their own surroundings but also about the backdrops of people living miles away.

As not all good cultural practices are born in one civilization, similarly not all bad practices are born in the other. Societies learn and grow with each other in order to progress towards the idealistic society where good prevails over evil and there is the concept of social inclusion for all.

Thoughts and values are exchanged which made societies to become more acceptable towards different backgrounds. We have learned about new music, art, dance, cuisine, fashion, language, behavioural patterns and other such cultural aspects of various other regions.

However, while looking at this perspective more intrinsically, we can identify that it has certain *negative* effect upon those in minority.

Local cultures are largely influenced by the western media tactics and thus in a way they are prompted to publish more western news as the behaviour of the people are also framed in such a way to promote the westernization concept. It affects the authenticity of a particular culture which ultimately affects a country's cultural domain in a global market.

Also providing tourism-friendly state and its experiences, government puts prime effort in attracting the tourists. In order to achieve this, more emphasis is placed on the conveniences and preferences of consumers and thus in a way our culture, traditional practices, artifacts just become the kind of commodity for foreign consumers.

The marginalized communities are affected by the cultural loss and erasure. It may ultimately result in socio-political backwardness.

The new concept of creation of notional status has been created which is more affecting the

sense of community and their internal relations with each other and in general an identification with the state to which they belong.

It also impacts the people psychologically as adopting a different culture leads to identity crisis and cultural confusion. People consider their own culture to be of inferior nature and they tend to perceive themselves negatively.

The more general response of local people towards homogenization is resistance and hybridization. This can be the survival mechanism of the people of particular culture who are being exposed towards the values of foreign culture more than the others, like through the strong influence of various mechanisms of cultural homogenization.

This cultural homogenization is bringing a sense of convenience and simplicity, to bring all the countries of the world at par. People consider it a form of standardization in imitating the foreign cultural values.

One argument can be made that globalisation has not resulted into any form of cultural homogenization, but a sense of togetherness, a sense of awareness about different belief systems. However, it needs to be noted that people are not even adopting a particular culture in this era, but it has become more of a matter of convenience in context of various matters like fashion, language spoken, food and cuisine, art and music and social practices, technology and innovation and architecture. Thus, ultimately, we are moving towards a society which lacks authenticity.

#### **(D) Mechanisms of Cultural Homogenization**

Now in this globalised era, one need not to necessarily travel to other places to know about the backdrop of people living over there.

To understand the concept in more simpler terms, we can say that there can be agents of homogenization – *media* and *cultural industries* that are set up at different places outside of the domestic country. Such a form of industrialization helps in shaping the wide variety of consumer culture and habits along with the global brands. This may contribute in eradicating the local identities of the host country. The Hollywood is one of the examples of all this, as it has major influence upon the audience worldwide through its narration and action.

Another phenomenon that contributes in homogenization by way of globalization is interconnectivity through *trade* and *investments*. This increases the availability of goods of similar nature in every country and contributes significantly in shaping the consumer consumption and behavioural patterns.

Also another mechanism that promotes the cultural homogenization is the *tourism sector*. It helps the people from different regions to know about the indigenous cultures of each other and promote the same in their respective countries.<sup>14</sup>

Due to the influence of the media, people find it difficult to have specific cultural identity of their own. Nowadays, it is more of a trend among people to not to consider just one belief system to be their own, but in fact, multiple cultures as per the convenience and even no culture at all. This has led to the concept of *Nihilism*, which is a philosophical concept believing in the concept of nothing. This gained prominence in the philosophical movements of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Adopting different cultures also raises the question that if an individual adopts one culture, then whether he or she has to completely let go of the other cultural values' or it can be accepted partially.

Another agent that contributes in cultural homogenization is the cultural exchange that happens through *migration*. This results in the unequal cultural dynamics between the two cultural practices that are being intersected. Due to the migration of people around the world, children born out of such union can be said to be multi-cultural having values of both the internal of family settings and of outside surroundings.

### III. IRANIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

Iran's national identity and global significance have been shaped through various complexities that took place through ancient to modern day civilizations. It is located in western Asia, which is also known as Persia and Islamic Republic of Iran. It has been an ethnically diverse country since Achaemenid period.



<sup>14</sup>Eman Zahid Jokhio, *Cultural Diversity in a Globalized World: Navigating Interconnected Realities* (Sept. 10, 2023), available at <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4589308>.



As in the image shown above, it shares its boundaries with Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Gulf of Oman, Persian Gulf and Iraq. Tehran is the capital and also the largest city of Iran and Shia Islam is the state religion. Persian is the official language which is spoken by the majority of people over here. Iran is a mixed economy, being the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest in natural gas reserves and 3<sup>rd</sup> largest in oil reserves.

### **(A) History and Origin**

The artefacts found in Iran shows the presence of human civilization since the lower Paleolithic age. In 2000 BC, Iran was mostly dominated by Median, Persian and Parthian tribes. Then from the late 10<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, Iranian people were within the Assyrian Empire in northern Mesopotamia. Around 730 BC, the unification of Median tribes in this region laid the foundation for the Median Empire. Then in 550 BC, Cyrus the Great, acquired the Median Empire during the Persian revolt and led to the formation of Achaemenid Empire. It is also known as the 1<sup>st</sup> Persian Empire. Then in 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, Alexander the Great defeated the last ruler of the Achaemenid Empire Darius III and established his rule. Then the Parthian Empire was dominating here in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. This was replaced by Sasanian Empire in 224 CE. Then the land was also ruled by the Rashidun Caliphate, Umayyad Caliphate and Abbasid Caliphate. After two centuries of Arab rule, semi-independent kingdoms like Tahirids, Saffarids, Samanids and Buyids flourished. This was considered to be the Golden period for Islam which reached its peak during 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> century. During 1219-1221, Iran faced a destructive invasion by the Mongol army led by Genghis Khan. Then various other dynasties ruled the land of Iran – Timur, Safavid, Afsharid, Zandiyeh and Qajar. In 1925, Reza Shah, an Iranian military officer established the Pahlavi dynasty. Then it was finally called as Iran, apart from the Imperial State of Persia. Then during the reign of his successor Mhd Reza Pahlavi, the democracy flourished. In the 1951 elections, Mhd Mossadegh was elected as the Prime Minister of the country. He nationalized the Iran's oil resources which threatened the monopoly of Britain. Then he was removed from the post of the Prime Minister in 1953 due to secret Anglo-American secret operation. This led Mhd Reza Pahlavi to take the control in his hands. He initiated reforms in Iran in 1963, known as the White revolution. This initiated the modern reforms which led to the education growth, economic growth and urbanization. This established the identity of Mhd Reza Pahlavi as the promoter of the westernization.



Then a staunch Muslim leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was not happy with this westernization, openly criticized this and this led to his expulsion. In 1973, due to rising prices of the oil resources, a situation of economic recession was formed and also led to the inflation and unemployment. Then by the end of 1970s, the reign of Shah suffered major revolt which led him to escape to America. Then in Feb 1979, the religious leader Khomeini, who had been living in exile in France, returned and led the Iranian Revolution.

Then the centuries of monarchy were replaced and Iran was established as the theocratic republic, where the government is controlled by the religious leaders and the people are governed by the religious law. The constitution was adopted by way of the referendum and it provides for the separation of powers among legislative, executive and judiciary. This religious leader also has the control over military, judiciary, guardian council and state media.

Before 1979, Iran experienced rapid economic development due to establishment of various industries. Then after revolution, there was decline in agricultural production and it also became the major food importer. Reforms and nationalization in 1979 coupled with Iran-Iraq war, brought over 80% of Iran's economy under governmental control. The government wanted to develop telecommunication, transport, manufacturing, health care, education and energy infrastructure by developing such diplomatic relations with other countries.

### **(B) Iran and Globalization**

It shows that in Iran, the development took place by adopting the modernization and industrialization practices of the western countries. They apprehended the dominance of western culture over their own and this apprehension led them to take a step before in order to gain the cultural identity back and sets back the growth of the nation. Globalization created two

major challenges for the Iranian culture – the danger of the destruction of the national identity and the marginalization of religious identity. Spread of globalization led to confusion and instability in individual and social behaviors in terms of transformation of traditions. Iranians were widely affected by the western media and advertising practices. As we have understood the history of Iranians, we know that they have witnessed thousands of tribes' culture upon their land. They have seen the creation and destruction of many civilizations. They always have been able to influence the cultural elements of migrants and even their own domestic nation.

As discussed, the various mechanisms of Globalization that could possibly led to cultural homogenization in a particular country, Iran is also affected by the similar mechanisms. So, it has also adopted certain ways to prevent the negative effects caused by the globalization. Like it does not allow foreign-based companies, not even in the form of franchises so that the food habits of the people remain unaltered. It tries to support indigenous companies. It even tries to coordinate traditional architecture with day-to-day technology. This has become more popular and is widely accepted by the people around the world.

Also due to its prime location, it was been able to enthusiastically participate in the exchange of technology and values. It needs to understand the values of different cultures in order to understand its own religious issues and resolve them effectively. Iranians need to have a strong cultural foundation in order to prevent itself from the flow of another wave of globalization. It should accept the globalization only to the extent to which it is affected by it positively and at the same time without undermining any of one's own cultural values and belief system.

### **(C) Critical Analysis**

Cultural homogenization caused due to globalization would may ultimately result into vanishing of cultural diversity. Adopting of specific cultural system, values and ideas would result into creation of *dominance* of certain *specific* nations only, which ultimately hampers the global growth rate.

Homogenization caused through globalization cannot be said to be absolute rather than that causing both homogeneity and heterogeneity. Though while looking at the wider perspective, it may be seen that the cultural homogeneity is affecting the mass of the population, however such a fact cannot be ignored that certain traditional forces have still remained intact even after the deeper invasion of the foreign control. The prince and the Nawabs of India have not given their cultural identity. They may show tolerance towards the western culture, however, they still have retained their traditional forms of dressing, taste and conduct. Similarly, the tribal communities like, Santhals in Bihar and Mundas in Jharkhand still hold onto their cultural identities despite

the forces of globalization taking place.

However, this is happening at a very smaller stage. Cultural diversity is retained; however, the impact of homogenization cannot be ignored, which is impacting the core values of the nation.

It is to be understood here that the main concern is not the globalisation or the cultural diversity that is being caused by it, but the *loss* of the culture and the dominance of one culture over the other. There is no doubt that the complete homogenization is not possible, as there would always be the room for the cultural differences. The main issue that would arise here is the loss of authenticity and neglect of own values and ideals.

Growing homogeneity can be a concern for people in developing countries in future prospects if the pace at which the westernisation is adopted remains continued. Such a homogenization cannot completely be eradicated or ignored. However, its consequences can be mitigated. Its effect won't much affect the nation as a whole if it is just a temporary phase or is remediable.

Active steps need to be taken by each respective country in order to resolve their own homogenization concerns. Different countries would be required to adopt their own respective approach to solve the problem, however, the more emphasis need to be laid upon the promotion of indigenous practices.

Though cultural homogenization can be acceptable but only upon the limited terms till it is not hampering the growth and culture of the host nation, and also not diluting their culture. Only such practices of the other culture to be adopted which are encouraging for the growth of the nation and would bring a positive approach in their development, and would help them to achieve an ideal welfare state.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Having a specific culture is totally evitable in today's era of globalisation and cultural diversity. A person can't be expected to remain totally aloof from a specific culture, as the human society is designed in such a way that the life of the people is governed by values and systems from birth till death. Every culture has originated in its own unique way and plays a significant role for the people that it governs. So in this way every culture is worthy of non-interference.

However, today in this globalising world, people are multi-cultural, they are not just being affected by other cultures, but they also willingly accept it and implement it in their daily lives. Now there is more of a trend of accepting things as per the convenience, so some terms of one culture is adopted along with some terms of another culture. However, being influenced by one culture and adopting it is a different thing; and neglecting and degrading one's own culture is a

different thing.

In order to prevent the overpowering and dilution of the cultural practices, there is the need to strike a balance between fostering the shared aspects of humanity and preserving the distinctiveness of each culture. This can be done by *strategic policy implementation*. This is a specific policy implementation which focuses upon cross-cultural understanding and awareness through educational reforms, responsible media representation, strong legal compliances towards preservation of cultural heritage and also encouraging formal cultural exchanges programs in schools, colleges and workplaces which permits, as the case may be. This not only increases awareness but also the respect and tolerance for diverse cultures. This would promote cultural diversity and would blossom such society based on mutual respect and understanding.

The future of globalisation and cultural homogenization depends more upon the level of interaction of different cultural values. It depends upon the specific country that how it takes it and to what extent it let it to interfere with its own cultural values.

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