

## CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBALISATION IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Namrata Sen**

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Bilasipara College, Dhubri, Assam

### **Abstract**

Globalisation is a phenomenon with multi-faceted dimension and is widely known the world over and hence not a novel concept. However, what is novel is the renewed interest and changing perspectives on the subject matter owing to the outbreak of the “Covid-19” pandemic in the month of December, 2019. Sporadic incidents of infection caused by this virus soon turned to a worldwide threat with its nippy proliferation. The waves of this shock were felt with varying degrees of intensity in almost all the countries of the globe within a very short span of time. And this led thinkers and experts to ponder upon how globalisation may have in very evident ways spurred the entire chain of events both at its source and end. Meaning, globalisation played a significant role in the commencement of the event and also in finding ways to deal with the same. Globalisation has created such a web of interconnectedness that boundaries seem to have become more or less insignificant. Meaning, the world has actually transformed in to one global village, close enough to be benefitted as well as adversely affected by almost every occurring in any part of the globe. Covid-19 pandemic too was no exception to the same. This paper begins with the history of globalisation to depict the why and how regarding its current status. Apart from this it also seeks to understand in details how and to what extent globalisation played a role in the series of events that unfurled with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, it centers its focus on the “movement of people and ideas” resulting from globalisation to describe in details the reason for change in perception on globalisation in this Covid-19 hit globe.

**Keywords:** Globalization, Covid-19, pandemic, phenomenon, movement, mankind, interconnectedness, globe

### **Introduction**

Going by definition globalization is “mostly simply (or simplistically) defined as a process of increasing interconnectedness between societies such that events in one part of the world increasingly have effects on peoples and societies far away” (SMITH, OWENS, & BAYLIS, 2014). In simple words it refers to a phenomenon resulting which people around the globe are coming close in almost all aspects of their life both physically and virtually. Globalization since its very inception has generated suspicion and insecurity in the minds of many. The most common seed of suspicion being the issue of sovereignty of states that globalization seems to threaten in some obvious ways. However, at the same time counter arguments are made that no matter how insignificant distance, borders and space has become and to whatever extent the globe has led to the shrinkage of the globe, the role and the hold of sovereign states is pivotal both in domestic and international arena. The matter of the fact or the bottom line here is that globalization has led to a tremendous increase in the communication of people, ideas, goods

from one part of the globe to another incurring both beneficial and detrimental effects. Now regarding the driving factors of this phenomenon of globalization and its cost-benefit analysis a detailed discussion will be made in a later section of this paper. What is interesting to note here is that this paper deals with two very important, talked about and at the same time controversial issues pressing the world in the contemporary times, that is, on one hand the parochial phenomenon of globalization and on the other the novel Covid-19 pandemic. And the unique turn of events that has created an indispensable bond; a cause effect relationship between the two and the lesson that it holds for the future of this “global village” is the focus of this paper. Before delving deeper into this indispensable bond, this paper seeks to go back in history of the phenomenon of globalization to understand circumstances in which and for what, it has taken the form as the world comprehends it today.

### **Statement of the problem**

Globalization is a well researched phenomenon. It has been studied well in all its dimensions gauging both its positive and negative impact. However the issue in hand here is the nexus between this well examined and discussed phenomenon and the most recent development in the arena of pandemic that distressed people worldwide. Given the recency of these series of events there is a scarcity of study in a holistic manner pointing precisely to the impact of two dimensions, that is, communication of people as ideas and its impact on spurring or curing the Covid-19 pandemic. It is this gap that this paper seeks to bridge and prepare ground for further research in the future.

### **Objectives**

1. To understand the historical development and the consequent proliferation of globalization across the globe.
2. To decipher the interconnectedness created by globalization especially in terms of “people” and “ideas”.
3. To discuss in details the beginning of the novel Covid-19 virus and the turn the later turn of events.
4. To understand the complex web of connection that developed between globalization and Covid-19.
5. To explain how globalization played a pivotal role multiplying the speed at which Covid-19 virus spread.
6. To explain how on the other hand globalization played a key role in neutralizing the virus.

### **Research questions**

1. When and in what circumstances did globalization spread its tentacles throughout the globe?
2. How has this interconnectedness especially in terms of ideas and people created this universe a global village?
3. How has globalization given a push to the spread of the pandemic?

4. How at the same time it has helped contain and create a solution to the pandemic?
5. What the future holds for the people of the globe characterized on one hand by globalization and on the other by such threats?

### **Methodology**

The methodology that has been utilized in conducting the research is descriptive and analytical. It uses qualitative data from secondary sources like books, journals, websites, newspaper excerpts etc.

### **Beginning of Globalization: a historical perspective**

The issue of the genesis of globalization is marred with discord among social scientists. The disagreement dealing basically with the fact that globalization in its strictly modern form is a novel phenomenon; however, similarities can be traced between some of its key characteristics and traditional practices leading to some authors referring to them as the “precursors of globalization” (a few of which will be mentioned here) (BAILYS, SMITH, & OWENS, 2014). First and foremost, one of the key attributes of globalization is the changing nature of the state from the parochial times leading to a spur in its responsibility on one hand and a decrease in its control of issues related to the same. This feature is also found to some extent in the modernization theory according to which with the inception of industrialization a drastic change has occurred in all spheres including political, social and economic as compared to the “pre modern world” (BAILYS, SMITH, & OWENS, 2014). It too has brought about alteration in the entire game of “power-politics” between states at the global level as has been done by globalization. Secondly, both in the period following industrialization and the one that is now being characterized by globalization there is a common pattern through which states strive for development. In both cases it can be traced that the less developed states sought to follow the footsteps of the “developed countries” to achieve their notion of development where they themselves become economically self-sufficient. All these, were happening in the backdrop of liberal democracy with both the phenomenon considering it as a helping hand towards achieving its goal. Thirdly, related to this notion is the one which claims that liberal democracies which are the foundation of most states of the globe in the contemporary times do not in general get into brawl with one another for various. The reasons mainly pertaining to the fact that states have come to be so closely knit in a multiplicity of dimensions that disturbance in one nation-state will lead to consequences in others. Thirdly, another indispensable element of globalization is the fact that time and space has been rendered rather compressed in the traditional sense of the term. Because with globalization the world has turned into what is popularly referred to as a “global village” almost in the literal sense of the term. This dimension was captured in the writings of Marshall McLuhan’s work. In his work he ponders over the fact this very arena where he attributes this development to tremendous progress made in the field of “communication technology”.

Apart from these theoretical “precursors” the chronological history suggests that traces of activities having some characteristics of globalization can be dated as early as 1<sup>st</sup> century

B.C. when for the very first time “luxury goods” (in particular- silk) began to be traded from one continent to another, that is, from Asia to Europe (Vanham, 2019). Though it did not contain the characteristics of present day globalization but it marked a “breakthrough” as trade for the first time was transcending national boundaries and trade routes were slowly beginning to operate on global level. Then came the Islamic traders and their naturally keen interest in trade particularly in spices which furthered the phenomenon of export in trade goods well through the medieval times. Hence, it can be said that the foundational bricks of globalization were slowly being laid though the extensive phenomenon of interconnectedness bringing the entire globe closer began with a boost from the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century. Just like it is said that a man is the child of his times, similarly, this phenomenon too got a boost during this time owing to a variety reasons like revolution in the field of science, discovery of the Americas, the era of colonization etc. The phenomenon of colonization gave a further push to trade between nations particularly because most of the colonial rulers were at heart merchant community who in the pretext of business then spread their tentacles as colonizers. However, economists are still not ready to give this phenomenon the title of globalization. And hence in history 19<sup>th</sup> century goes down as the time when the 1<sup>st</sup> big wave of what is today understood as “globalization” began. By then Britain had become the epicenter of mass scale trade mostly due to the famous Industrial Revolution which worked as a double sided sword (positively) for Britain, firstly, through breakthrough in the field of communication and secondly through colossal industrial development which made production of goods possible on a mass scale. Thus, Britain was able to cater to the demand to supply ratio in the market. The share of such trade in the “Gross Domestic Product (GDP)” gradually increased over the years up until the “First World War”. Since the entire phenomenon of globalization rests purely on the cooperation between nations, it was appalled by the disruptions created by the First and then the Second World War that ended in the year 1945 (Vanham, 2019).

This again created circumstances suitable for the steep rise in the volume of intra and inter nation trade, movement of people, capital, ideas and so on though it was then aided by two superpowers in the era of Cold War. It was thus after the end of the Cold War that globalization became a “truly” global occurrence.

### **The social dimension of globalization with reference to the movement of people and ideas**

Having known the history of globalization and the events unraveling this phenomenon as it stands today; this paper then moves to the movement of people resulting from this phenomenon. Globalization as has already been discussed has eased the movement not only of goods and capital but also of population and ideas. From a broader perspective, there are basically two facets of globalization. This migration of people from one country to another is nothing new however, what is unique or remarkable about this in the era of globalization is its magnitude. The reason for such rapid increase in the magnitude, frequency and the scope of such movement is multidimensional. One very evident factor is the economic opportunities created by globalization which lures such movement; the other quality education and the easier access to institutes of learning in other countries; thirdly, deteriorating climate condition in some countries again indirectly related to industrialization, privatization and ultimately globalization;

political unrest, global terrorism etc to name a few. In fact both globalization and movement of people have a complex cause-effect boomerang relation wherein globalization triggers movement and this in turn helps intensify the former. Intricately related to this is the dissemination of ideas and information assisted majorly by the revolution in the field of technology and channeled globally through globalization. As a result any happening in one part of the world not only travels ears from one country to another almost immediately but also its effects are felt with the same frequency. It has both positive and negative aspects which will be discussed in details later in this chapter. However, with regard to the objective of this paper, the focus here will be the result of such movement and how it contributed to the spread of Covid 19 virus.

### **A chronological development of the spread of Covid-19**

Delving into the chronological and gradual spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the very first case is said to have been from Hubei province in the city of Wuhan on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2019 as per reports from the media on “unpublished Chinese government data”. In fact according to the very same post, there were about 60 cases by December, 2019. However, official statement that came from the Chinese authority of the first person to be affected by such symptoms comes much later on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 (Davidson, 2020). The fact that whether the Chinese authority is to be blamed for covering up such outbreak, the reasons behind it (if at all true) is a much complex one and out of the purview of this paper. Hence, this paper will focus on its spread and the role that globalization had to play in the entire series of events. Therefore moving on to the chronology, it was on December 31<sup>st</sup> that the China unit of “World Health Organization (WHO)” was informed about the people being affected by a disease with similar symptoms. However, it was only on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2020 that WHO labeled it as “Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and as a “pandemic” even later on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020).

It was on 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, that the first case of a person being affected by the novel virus was detected outside China, in Thailand which in a way indicated towards human to human transmission of the disease. However, it was on January 21, 2020 that a Chinese scientist by the name “Zhong Nanshan” confirmed this doubt. It then started spreading like wildfire with the same speed as globalization has helped humankind achieve with ease. In fact after the first confirmed case of Covid-19 positive case outside of China in the month of January 2020, it mushroomed to “US, Iran, Australia, India and South East Asia. It then started spreading its tentacles to all the major countries of the globe with a blink of an eye and as on 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, 2023, there is only one country that has been left untouched by Covid-19 pandemic is Turkmenistan meaning that as many as 194 countries of 195 was affected with Covid-19 pandemic with varying degrees of intensity. And Covid has been fatal for about 6,932,591 people around the globe and a total of 766,440,796 “confirmed cases” (as on 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2023) with USA topping the list, followed by China, India and France, Germany, Brazil, Japan to name a few (2023, p. WHO).

Now, coming to another very significant dimension of these surprising turn of events that started in 2019, that is, Covid-19 outbreak, is the imposition of travel restrictions and the



route of Quarantine to curb the spread of the virus or slow its speed to some extent. With the confirmation of the human to human transmission of the virus states began imposing travel checks for people coming from foreign countries particularly those with high rate of confirmed cases. Travel by all means were restricted by January 2020, using various tactics like restricting travel to and from some destinations either completely or partially depending on the intensity of the situation in those places, both inter-country and intra-country sealing of borders, quarantine guidelines etc. Lockdown were imposed in almost all the major countries of the globe, affecting people from all strata of life, belonging to scattered regions of the globe. Its effects for individuals, nations and globe as a whole will be dealt in the next section of the paper. In fact it was found by the “United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)” that 100 percentages of the places all across the globe had some sort of travel obligations owing to Covid-19 and about 72% still had a complete pause on tourist (REGIONS, 2020).

### **Covid 19 against the backdrop of globalization: a boon or a bane**

Coming to the main crux of the paper, that is, Covid-19 in the era of globalization, it is indispensable to have a fair idea of such similar outbreaks in the past and how (if at all) it is different from and the reason behind its uniqueness. Pandemics per se are not new, it is something that mankind have experienced from time immemorial. Before delving deep in this arena, knowing what the word pandemic stands for is indispensable. Cambridge Dictionary defines pandemic as “(of a disease) existing in almost all of an area or in almost all of a group of people, animals, or plants.” In simple words in the context of this paper pandemics are such diseases that cross national boundaries resulting in making a huge population spread in various parts of the “globe” its victims. It is this global impact of such diseases that give it the nomenclature of a pandemic. Now, its definition itself suggests that pandemics are not a novel occurrence. Going back in history, the first such known pandemic that hit mankind hard was the “Plague of Justinian (CE 541-542) of which about 25% of population particularly in North Africa, Asia and Europe fell prey. Then came the fatal and dreadful Black Death around 1346-1353 which wiped out over one-third of the population of Europe. It was during this time that the concept of “quarantine” to prevent the further spread of disease was implemented (Lindquist, 2020). Then the “Russian Flu” that broke out in the period 1889-1893 and became fatal for approximately 1 million people in the world over a period of 3 years. Next the “Spanish flu” in the year 1918 that haunted mankind through three fatal waves taking about 50 million lives and affecting 500 million the world over.

The issue in hand as already stated above is the fact that how has globalization triggered or given a further push in making these pandemics particularly Covid-19 (to be precise) more fatal and contagious. It has been made clear in the beginning of paper itself that people have travelled from one part of the world to another even before globalization in its modern connotation made its appearance. However, its magnitude increased tremendously since the rise of globalization. The reason very diverse ranging from economic opportunities, ease in travel restrictions, educational purpose, better healthcare etc. The common factor here is that travelling from one part to another became easier as borders opened up both for the import and export of goods as well as the exchange of people and ideas (which is the main crux of

globalization). As a result more people are now “on the move”. People now travel for a mosaic of reason and to places which were difficult to travel or unknown to mankind. In fact the extent of people’s travel have increased to such an extent that it compelled many political scientists to label the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the “century of migration” (Knobler, Mahmoud, Lemon, & Pray, 2006). It was against this backdrop that pandemics are taking place now. Since most of the above mentioned pandemics have the attribute of “human-to-human” transmission it is very obvious that the more the physical communication among people the higher the chances of it to contaminate the greater population. And exactly this is what was seen in case of novel Covid-19 virus. It actually “travelled” from one part of the globe to another expeditiously baffling the policy makers which ultimately delayed the process of containing the spread making it more fatal. It was then that travel restrictions were imposed in almost every part of the world, borders were sealed, quarantine facilities were made, both inter country and intra country travel was terminated and all of a sudden the world came to a standstill. The distance that was once made meaningless with the reign of globalization again seemed to redeem its meaning. The idea of global village a day dream and the borders as high as they have never been. It felt like “rolling back” of globalization to a great extent. The entire globe was forced to survive within a lockdown. Economies crashed and hit rock bottom, political instability started raising its head, and there was insatiability in every sphere of people’s lives. Everything that mankind had learned over decades, things that were as normal as breathing became a “castle in air”. In simple words the world came to a standstill. Not going deep into the economic or political impact of Covid-19 virus (since it is out of the scope of this paper), the matter of concern here is that globalization had a catalyst role in the amplification of the disease and it cannot be denied.

However, before coming to any conclusive result it is also necessary to examine whether there is any silver lining to the outbreak of Covid-19 particularly in the era of globalization. Now, globalization as has been stated already not only characterizes the travel of people from to and fro countries or within countries or from villages to cities, but also the dissemination of ideas from one end of the globe to another with the blink of an eye. Meaning globalization together with the development in the arena of information and communication technology has created an environment where there is a free and speedier flow of information as compared to the earlier times information about a happening in one place took days, months or even years to reach people living elsewhere. Now, the entire globe comes to know about any occurrence happening in any part either simultaneously like the 9/11 attack which was telecasted live on TV or within a very short span of time. Now, the question here is how is this relevant in the context of this paper? Going back to the onset of Covid-19 pandemic, there are many ways this particular arena also helped reduce the extremes of the situation.

**Firstly**, it is this ease with which idea travels that made it possible for mankind to become aware of such a pandemic within no time once it was known to people in China. This helped countries to be somewhat better prepared for the situation which would not have been possible otherwise. Though the minor and major glitches or mismanagement were there which cannot be ignored, this being out of the purview of this paper will be kept aside.

Focusing on the positive side of it, the next benefit in line would be **secondly**, the fact

that this dissemination of ideas aided the creation of networks of helping hands for the people in dire need. For example NGOs came to the aid of people in need only through the chain of information that was created. Example can here be given of a Delhi based NGO called Sarvahitey which achieved this very thing, Interns and volunteers were appointed and each was assigned one district in India. Their duty was to gather all authentic information related to Covid 19 of their respective districts like the number of Covid confirmed cases of the day, the death toll, places and the timing when essential shops like grocery shops, Pharmacies etc were open, areas new areas that were declared Containment zone in that particular district etc. These information were then disseminated by the volunteers on various social media platforms like Facebook, twitter etc so that this could reach as many people as possible and maximum people could be benefited. This information was also used to create a chain of people who helped people on the move due to the sudden lockdown restriction to reach home safely.

**Last** but not the least the discovery of effective vaccination against the virus within one year from the declaration of the disease as a pandemic by the WHO. It has made a ground breaking history as the fastest developed vaccine against any disease. The previous to be labeled as the fastest was one against mumps that was developed within 4 years between “development to deployment” in the 1960s (Cohen, 2020). The main factor here is multifaceted and hence no unanimous conclusion can be drawn. However, one very obvious cause is the ease, magnitude, and efficiency with which ideas are exchanged owing mainly to globalization aided with tremendous revolution in the field of ICT. In fact it was these sharing of ideas amongst scientists on this matter that was the major reason for the development of effective vaccine to such a widespread pandemic at such a lightning speed (apart from the groundwork that was already done owing to a some other viruses like HIV, SARS, Ebola etc.) (Cohen, 2020). In fact one study said that “the ability to fast-track research and clinical trials was direct result of this worldwide cooperation” (Cohen, 2020).

### **Discussion:**

It is clear by now that globalization is an unavoidable phenomenon. Every country that seeks to be in the radar of being recognized as important cannot remain isolated like USA once was. But it is for countries to decide the extent to which such a phenomenon will be internalized in their country. As it is commonly said that “scarcity is the mother of all invention”, the same applies to Covid-19 pandemic which compelled countries to take drastic measures like lockdown, quarantine, social distancing, stringent measures for those who violated the rules etc. In simple it put a stop on almost everything that the larger population has been habituated with over the years. Policies of social distancing were being implemented at a time when globalization is claiming to create a “global village” with increasing proximity and indispensable interconnectedness. In connection with the focus of this paper, migration of people for two reasons will be focused, work and education. As per data from “International Labour Organization (ILO)”, as of 2019 a total of 169 million people were identified as “migration workers”. As far as students on the move are concerned it is estimated at a whopping 4.6 million. And as has already been shown earlier this increase in the communication of people from one part of the globe to another was one of the main reasons for the spike in the number



of cases. However, with this came alternatives in the form of online classes and work from home. Had it happened in times when these technologies were not available, students would have lost years and many companies would have shut and an even graver economic crisis would have occurred. Students living in remote parts of the globe too could avail education (though there were many difficulties still in the same), and people could work sitting in the comfort of their houses. It also created awareness on the need to live in proximity with nature, focusing on small and cottage industry, indigenous practice etc.

## Recommendations

From the aforesaid, the following recommendations can be drawn:

1. First and foremost it is necessary to understand the uniqueness of circumstances in every part of the globe before applying anything including globalization solely as a clone phenomenon copying any “western model”.
2. Related to this again is understanding “development” as subjective rather than an objective or “universal” understanding of it which lures countries to a great extent to copy their (particularly western model) without modification to adjust to their particular circumstances. A good example of this is the mixed economic model that was adopted by India immediately after independence.
3. Another very basic recommendation will be to opt for the alternatives that were opened up by Covid-19 pandemic particularly in the arena of academics.
4. The most fruitful alternative amongst them is the blended learning method, meaning a mix of both online and offline procedures in teaching and learning.
5. Similar to this is another very important arena is one that constitutes a major chunk of population that is a part of “people on the move” and that is, people who live in countries other than that of origin for earning a living. To this a very useful alternative is “work from home” methodology.
6. Apart from this another very viable alternative that will go a long way would be to learn from our indigenous population about their ways of life, their idea of development, their modes of teaching which mostly always points towards a better and sustainable future.
7. Last but not the least is developing infrastructure in our own country, region or continent which will to a very great extent slow down the process of “brain drain” in both academic and economic perspectives.

## Conclusion

Like every side coin has two sides, so does this phenomenon called globalization. As discussed above, this phenomenon played a pivotal role in bringing people, societies, politics and economies closer. Whether globalization created an environment where living isolated is unthinkable on part of countries as a whole in every aspect be it political, social, economic, environmental or so on , or was it a natural product of the development taking place around the globe is very difficult to decipher. Whatever may be the case, the issue here is that taking extreme roads always leads to extreme results. The contemporary time as it stands today is one of globalization, of trans-boundary relations in almost every aspect of life. This has a very

positive impact on human kind especially in terms of health, education, economic improvement, cultural exchange etc to name a few. Interestingly however, in each and every aspect mentioned here, the same phenomenon has created even greater threats. To be precise, in terms of health, as can be seen in case of Covid-19 “pandemic”, in terms of education there is now the issue of “brain drain”, scarcity of opportunity for citizens themselves in their motherland; in terms of economic improvement the hope of globalization elevating all the nations from poverty still seems to a distant dream given the increasing gap between the rich and the poor; and last but not the least in terms of cultural exchange, it has also created the threat of “homogenization of cultures”. Though again in all these cases, the globalization is but one of the factors, its role cannot be ignored. Especially in terms of Covid-19 pandemic this proximity created by globalization cost humanity precisely 6,927,378 human lives around the globe as on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2023 apart from the other adverse and at the same time some historical low points in economic, social and cultural aspects. Though again, it is another aspect of globalization that is, the dissemination of ideas with the speed of light, which did play a key role in preventing many more lives to be lost, the question that haunts mankind is whether it would have happened with the same intensity prior globalization era. It thus opens before humanity, alternatives to choose from like it did during the pandemic (choosing the middle path) and saving itself from another catastrophe.

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