



## **Does Globalisation Impact Indigenous Knowledge and Resource Management Practices Today? An Analytical Perspective in Sustainable Development from a Remote Village in Kinnaur District, Himachal Pradesh, India**

**SYED AIMAN RAZA**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Shia P. G. College, Lucknow, E-mail id: [aimanraza@gmail.com](mailto:aimanraza@gmail.com)*

Received: 19 Oct. 2020 / Revised: 22 Oct. 2020 / Accepted: 25 Oct. 2021 / Published: 15 January 2021

---

**Abstract:** There has been a crucial move in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from development to globalization – that is shift from the Bretton Woods system of development centred on nation-states to the rise of economic neo-liberalism or contemporary globalisation. Neoliberalism is not monolithic, but has varying forms and consequences nationally and locally. The paper is based on ethnographic data gathered from a mountain village which analyses not only the pros and cons of neoliberalism affecting the mountain economy, but also discusses various social and cultural features getting modified due to competition driven market forces. The paper can be seen as contributing to the issues related to sustainable development, indigenous knowledge and resource management practises along with an anthropological perspective about development.

**Keywords:** Globalisation; resource management; indigenous knowledge; sustainable development

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globalisation is on the political, economic and social science agenda. The term globalisation, even more than development, is a protean term, with distinct connotations for different people, a moving target that is not the same from one day to the next or in different locations or social institutions. According to Knauf, globalisation like capitalism and modernity is a megatrop (Knauf, 2002:34). Similarly Anna Tsing comments that “globalism is a multireferential: part corporate hype and capitalist regulatory agenda, part cultural excitement, part social commentary and protest” (Tsing, 2000:332). For many anthropologists, globalisation signifies accelerated flows or intensified connections - across national and other boundaries – of commodities, people, symbols, technology, images, information, and capital, as well as disconnections, exclusion, marginalization and dispossession (Appadurai, 1996; Ferguson, 1999).

---

What is historically remarkable is the celebration of a particular form of globalisation—economic liberalism. The most “global” discourse on globalisation is certainly the economic perspective identifying globalisation with the working of free world markets, demanding the opening up of national economies, de-regulation and in general a reduction of state control over national economic resources and international capital flows. This global integration is regarded as the major means to achieve development and modernization.

While this may seem fairly innocuous, but globalisation certainly raises many concerns about its impacts on culture, traditional ways of living, and indigenous control in less developed parts of the world, where survival strategies are based on indigenous knowledge. Owing to globalisation, the cultural base of many tribal groups is fast eroding, giving way to consumerism and creating cultural fragmentation in the form of micro-classes. The example of Maori is of importance here. The Maori indigenous movement made important inroads into New Zealand politics in the 1970s and 1980s. This led to numerous concessions both cultural and economic. The restoration of tribal lands led ultimately to the establishment of “tribal capitalism” (Rata, 1997) in which the tribal units were able to run fisheries while maintaining their conical clan structures. This created a new hierarchy of control within the tribal units, since those closest to the central lineages were those who controlled the capital. The Maori today control a third of New Zealand’s fisheries, but in an equal way. More seriously, those Maori who do not have genealogical access to the tribal land remain in their urban slums. They make up 40 to 50 percent of the population. Thus the Maori success story has created a class division within the group that did not exist previously (Friedman, 2005:166).

However, the effects of globalisation are of course are not uniformly negative; rather than they can be double edged, as illustrated by studies such as Chibnik’s (2003) of Oaxacan wood carvings. Global markets for these Mexican crafts have helped many Oaxacan families to improve their standard of living, and “even the worst-off artisans are better off than they were before the boom” of the past two decades (Chibnik, 2003:239).

Therefore, this paper attempts to analyse the pros and cons of globalisation affecting the economic structure and cultural process of a mountain tribal group in western Himalayas. The paper is based on ethnographic data collected during the period of 2003-2005 from a single large village Jangi (altitude 2790 m) of Morang Tehsil in Pooch Division of Kinnaur district in Himachal Pradesh. The study village is multi-ethnic, having four ethnic groups, i.e., the Rajput, Lohar, Badhai and the Koli with a population of 668 people. The Rajputs are landowners and agriculturists/horticulturists, but the other three caste groups, the Koli (Weaver and Tailor), the Lohar (Blacksmith) and the Badhai (Carpenter) have specific caste

occupations along with agriculture and horticulture (Raha and Mahato, 1985; Raha, 1978; Chandra, 1992)

Most of the information on the economy and culture comes from a participant-observation study of this village combined with extensive, semi-structured interviews of the local villagers. There were also even 'depth interviews' in which I allowed the respondents to express themselves freely about their subjective dimensions. Village census, case studies and genealogies were also used during fieldwork to access the socio-economic articulation and social structure.

### **DIVERSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURE: A KEY FEATURE OF GLOBALISATION**

The unfolding globalisation of agriculture due to liberalisation, as a plank policy in most of south Asian countries since the late 1980s, however, has thrown new challenges and opportunities to the agrarian sector in these countries. While there are apprehensions on one hand, that the influx of subsidised cheap imports from the developed countries would adversely affect their agriculture, on the other hand, there is evidence that these countries are able to raise their agricultural export, especially of high value and labour intensive commodities. This seems to open up a window of opportunities when south Asian agriculture is experiencing shrinking size of its holdings, stagnating technological advances in staple crops, declining investment in agriculture and increasing degradation of natural resources.

Therefore, diversification of agriculture in favour of more competitive and high-value commodities is reckoned as an important strategy to overcome many of these emerging challenges. It is a way of comprehending risk in production in places where land is small and resources are few and production can be erratic. The best example to such adaptation can be viewed among the mountain ecosystem in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh.

Agriculture in the village Jangi, dominates with maize (*Zea mays*), wheat (*Triticum aestivum*), green pea (*Pisum sativum*), potatoes (*Solanum tuberosum*), legumes and seasonal vegetables. Most of the horticultural crops like apple (*Pyrus malus*), walnut (*Juglance regia*), peach (*Prunus persia*), pear (*Prunus communis*), almond (*Prunus amygdalus*) and chilgoza pine (*Pinus gerardiana*) etc. are cultivated along with crops due to lack of fertile land. Overall the cultivation is done by using orthodox techniques of farming.

People in the village have a good knowledge of the local conditions and they know what type of fruits can be grown in the prevailing climatic conditions. In the view of Roshan Lal Negi, an agriculturist cum horticulturist, fruit cultivation is the only profitable enterprise. He says "crop growing is not much of utility. Cereals such as ogla and phapra (*Fagopyrum*

*poligonus*), kidney bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris* L. Red kidney 'Rajma'), barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), maize (*Zea mays*) and kodra (*Paspalum Serobiculatum*) are grown on substantive basis, but slowly losing ground to cash crops. In fact ogla and phapra (*Fagopyrum poligonus*) are no longer grown in the village. Another vanishing tree from the village is that of wild apricot called 'chulli' (*Prunus armenica*). The main reason for the diminishing trees is that people are running after cash crops, the cash economy is driving them on an unsustainable path and there is no one to put them on track. Chulli fruits are eaten and also used to make alcoholic brew called 'rak'. In earlier times chulli oil was used for lighting purpose and also as a medium in cooking food but is no longer used. Vegetable oil has replaced chulli oil as the former is easily available in the market. I am still maintaining many chulli trees and I know its importance as a medicinal plant, relieving from ailments like fever and protecting power against severe cold. We still use chulli oil in our food. If I will cut them, I know I will lose species of a tree which I will never get back. Cash generating crops have taken most of the area of all the above traditional crops which once used to be the main source of food. Now apple only accounts for more than three-fourths of the area under horticulture. Apart from apples another major dry fruit is chilgoza pine (*Pinus gerardiana*) locally known as neoza, brings in heavy cash from the market". Here it can easily be said that the global process of socio-economic development is destroying local bio-diversity to a certain extent.

The increasing integration of national economies into global markets promises to alter dramatically, the volume and character of international resource flows. The Kinnaurese also feel for the same forces that they should also step in the global markets with their products especially with the famous Kinnaurese apples and neozas. The importance of horticulture and the economic benefits are well known to them. Many households contract out their orchards to fruit agents/ sellers from Delhi at the beginning of the season while the trees are budding. This provides the household with a guaranteed income from their orchard regardless of the harvest. Some farmers who have links in Delhi market (Azadpur Fruit Market) sell the fruit themselves, thus ensuring they receive a higher price than the market price offered by the government.

Moreover, the villagers are now connected to the global world through radios and televisions and as they listen to the news, they know exactly how the global markets are moving. The technological elements, communication and transport systems, have accelerated the pace of globalisation. On the positive side, improvements in communication and the spread of information were critical to the collapse of the Iron Curtain. People learnt what was happening in other countries and understood that they did not have to live the way they were living, and the 'Iron Curtain' fell. In this regard, by the time this study was completed, 49 of the 103 households had television in their homes, out of which 11 had dish antenna

and were watching satellite television. Most of the houses had telephone connections that were usually functional for most part of the year. About two small hotels and five general merchant shops, selling a range of daily-utility items, like packed tea, toffees, flour, condiments, soaps, notebooks, pencils, pens, etc., were established. This spurt in the growth of shops is due to the people's preference for packed, readymade items. The easy availability of edible products, like flour, has led to the decline in traditional crops like *ogla* and *phapra* which will be facing the threat of extinction in a couple of years.

### ECONOMIC DISPARITY

Although one can easily notice the temptation of the tribal population towards a market driven economy which is giving rich rewards in terms of monetary gains from the selling of apple (*Pyrus malus*), walnut (*Juglance regia*), almond (*Prunus amygdalus*) and chilgoza pine (*Pinus gerardiana*). But signs of loss of certain species of fruits such as chulli and *ogla* and *phapra* are evident, which are loosing the competition in cash driven market economy. People no longer want to grow crops which cannot be sold in the market as they are occupying the space, which could be utilised for other cash giving fruits. Moreover there is wide inequality in terms of economic status of the villagers. The reason to this is the disproportionate landholding among the different ethnic groups (see table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Land Possession of Caste Groups in Hectares**

<i>Caste Groups</i>	<i>Irrigated Land (Hct)</i>	<i>Unirrigated Land (Hct)</i>	<i>Barren Land (Hct)</i>	<i>Total (Hct)</i>	<i>%</i>
Rajput	199.75	42	46.5	288.25	85.85
Koli	19.5	9.7	7	36.25	10.79
Badhai	2	2.2	0.5	4.75	1.41
Lohar	4	2.5	0	6.50	1.93
Total	225.25	56.5	54	335.75	100

From the above table it is evident that the Rajputs holds the maximum irrigated land (199.75 hectares) an appreciably high percentage of land when compared to the other castes in the village. This has serious consequences in terms of power dimensions and equity.

The Rajputs are the richer section of the village and holds the political power of the village life and give leadership to the village. As the Rajputs have more irrigated land under their possession, they get better yield both in quality and quantity. They are always in a better position to use improve their technical know-how, like using expensive fertilizers and modern spraying machines, enabling them to reap greater benefits. The lower castes due to their

inadequate resources in both technology and capital are always lagging behind and could not avail the benefits of market forces. Most of these lower castes end up working for Rajput landowners in the agricultural cum horticultural fields for nominal daily wages. Thus a rapid pace of development in horticulture and increasing economic disparity due to a higher capital flow towards the Rajputs may cause severe economic divisions in the social stratification, in the years to come.

### EXPANDING HORIZONS

Mountain regions which used to be the remotest regions of this planet are not even spared to the externally induced changes of development. They now often provide unique and sometimes the best opportunities to detect and analyse global change processes and phenomena. In this respect, the process of globalisation needs special attention to analyse change and for the next few decades, globalisation processes are likely to be at least as important as environmental changes, as factors promoting change in mountain regions.

Although in Kinnaur, there are many changes that have occurred over the years, due to the initiative of the government, like development of roads, expanding telecommunication network through cellular phones in the district, providing electricity, hospitals etc. But to access the expanding horizons of any traditional society, the movement of young girls to other parts of the country or villages should be noticed. This movement is to gain education or for employment purposes. As far as Jangi is concerned the village girls are opting to become *chomos* (nuns). Although, the number is very less, but still it is quite significant to note the movement of young girls outside the village to other distant States. There could be two reasons why they renounce the worldly lives, firstly, that they now have the facilities for all women monasteries; secondly, in harsh living conditions they are at the helm affairs. Right from fetching water to running a business, they have to bear the brunt of it all and that too in a difficult terrain and weather conditions. This suggests that the rate of population growth might remain under check until some time. However, it may escalate soon. This concern stems from the experience of other trans-Himalayan Buddhist communities that are undergoing rapid population growths following a breakdown of the traditional population regulation mechanisms (Fox et al., 1994; Goldstein, 1981). A closer examination shows that such a process is already in effect in Jangi. In case of marriage, the traditional polyandrous negotiation is gradually being replaced by monogamous marriages. Monogamy is the general practice now as polyandry is fast declining. People are not favoring polyandrous marriages. Similarly, the independent-family households have out-numbered the extended-family type. There is predominance of nuclear families among the lower castes may be due to economic

reasons. As the castes do not possess sufficient land and have no substantial property to hold the interest of members to the joint family norm, the young after marriage break away from their parental authority.

Even more significant is in the change in occupational structure. The Koli's and Badhai's have made significant advances in the job sector. Only the Lohars are lagging behind in the village among the scheduled castes. The table below shows the progress made by the scheduled caste groups.

Table 2 reveals that the castes which are associated with their specialized occupational activities are now not consonant with their classical assignments in the caste system. Thus the Kolis are weavers and Badhais are carpenter by profession, but in the contemporary social order they have started venturing in other occupations which at one time were alien to them. These changes are more symptomatic than statistically significant; reveal the facts of gradual diversification of the occupational roles.

**Table 2**  
**Employment among the Koli and Badhai Caste Group**

No.	<i>Koli (Weaver/Tailor)</i>		<i>Badhai (Carpenter/Mason)</i>
	In Job/Type/Place	No.	In Job/Type/Place
1	M.B.B.S( Shimla)	1	Clerk , Food and Supplies Deptt.Peo
1	Lab Technician, Shimla.		
1	Teacher (10+2), Morang Tehsil.		
1	Teacher (Part Time), (10+2), Morang Tehsil.		
1	Clerk,MiddleHigh School,Jangi.		
1	Air Force, Sec. Lieutenant,Pune.		

## CONCLUSION

The overall analysis has attempted to analyse how globalisation is impacting a traditional mountain village in India. Both the positives and negatives are well highlighted in the above argument. On the positive side, through diversification of agriculture in favour of more competitive and high-value commodities, people have comprehended risk in production as land is small and resources are few. The Kinnaurese of Jangi, over the years have adapted to global changes of economy and climate, by dispelling those unwanted variety of crops which were unproductive and accepting those which provide maximum output and return in terms of money. Several micro-level studies support the above proposition (Pingali and Rosegrant, 1995; Ramesh, 1996; Ryan and Spencer, 2001; Von Braun, 1995). The people

have opened up to a whole new world of market driven economy and are non hesitant to move to places for selling their horticultural produce. People can make their own decisions about who their trading partners are and what opportunities they wish to pursue. Cultural barriers are getting shattered where girls now move out of the district to become *chomos* (nuns) to pursue Buddhist education and lower caste groups are moving out in search of jobs in cities. A sort of cultural change is on the cards.

On the negative side the loss of bio-diversity is a major concern in the context of globalisation of agriculture. People are reluctant to grow indigenous crops like ogla and phapra (*Fagopyrum poligonus*), which are resistant to crop failures and have helped the community to sustain livelihood for thousands of years. This in turn has affected the traditional food security system of the natives (Maikhuri et al. 1996; Kuniyal, et al., 2004). Therefore need adequate conservation care by popularizing them and adopting suitable multiplication techniques. Otherwise, some day these crops may become extinct from the systems. Similarly traditional economic and cultural practices are on the verge of decline as people are opting out to newer income resources and even changing their marriage and family systems.

But seeing globalisation as negative or positive misses the point. The problem is not globalisation per se. It is the role of the government and development institutions which should be held accountable. An intervention of government and development agencies is needed to look at the real situation prevailing at the local village level and how to curb the uneven mode of unsustainable developmental process which is creeping in slowly. As far as the village economy is concerned, progress towards empowering the lower castes can only be made when they are allotted more irrigated land, which in turn could be possible by employing better irrigational strategies used in mountainous regions. There arises a need to curb the negatives and accept the positives of globalisation, which is empowering people to use market positively to their advantage and remove all the inequalities of class. Thus, until and unless a congenial social environment is created, the fruits of development can not be sustained.

### *References*

- Appadurai, A. (1996). *'Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization'*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Chandra, R. (1992). *'Highlanders of North Western Himalayas'*, New Delhi: Inter-India Publication.
- Chibnik, M. (2003). *'Crafting Tradition: The Making and Marketing of Oaxacan Wood Carvings'*, Austin,Tx: University of Texas Press.



- Ferguson, J. (1999). *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meaning of Urban Life on the Zambian Copper-belt*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fox, J.L., Nurbu, C., Bhatt, S. and Chandola, A. (1994). 'Wildlife conservation and land-use changes in the Trans-Himalayan region of Ladakh, India', *Mountain Research and Development*, Vol. 14, pp.39-60.
- Friedman, J. (2005). Globalization, Dis-integration, Re-organization: The Transformations of Violence, in Marc Edelman and Angelique Haugerud (Eds.) *The Anthropology of Development and Globalization: From Classical Political Economy to Contemporary Neoliberalism*, UK, Blackwell Publishing, pp.166
- Goldstein, M.C. (1981). 'High altitude Tibetan populations in the remote Himalaya: social transformation and its demographic, economic, and ecological consequences', *Mountain Research and Development*, Vol. 1, pp.5-18.
- Knauff, B. (2002). 'Critically Modern: An Introduction, in Bruce Knauff, (Ed.) *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*', Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1-54.
- Kuniyal, J.C., Vishvakarma, S.C.R., Singh, G. S. (2004). 'Changing crop biodiversity and resource use efficiency of traditional versus introduced crops in the cold desert of the northwestern Indian Himalaya: a case of the Lahaul valley', *Biodiversity and Conservation*, Vol.13, pp. 1271-1304
- Maikhuri R.K., Rao K.S. and Saxena K.G. (1996). 'Traditional crop diversity for sustainable development of central Himalayan agroecosystems', *The International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, Vol.3, pp. 8-31.
- Pingali, P.L. and Rosegrant, M.W. (1995). 'Agricultural, commercialization and diversification: processes and policies', *Food Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp.171-186.
- Raha, M.K. (1978). 'Stratification and religion in a Himalayan society', in J.F. Fisher (Ed.) *Himalayan Anthropology: the Indo Tibetan Interface*, Hague: Mouton Publication, pp.83-102.
- Raha, M.K. and Mahato, S.N. (1985). *The Kinnaurese of the Himalayas*, Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India.
- Ramesh, C. (1996). 'Diversification through high value crops in western Himalayan region: evidence from Himachal Pradesh', *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp.652-663.
- Rata, E.M. (1997). 'Global Capitalism and the revival of ethnic traditionalism in New Zealand: The emergence of Tribal-Capitalism', Ph.D. thesis, University of Auckland.
- Ryan, J.G. and Spencer, D.C. (2001). *Future Challenges and Opportunities for Agricultural R&D in the Semi-Arid Tropics*, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Patancheru, Andhra Pradesh, India.
- Tsing, A. (2000). 'The Global Situation', *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 15, No.3, pp. 327-360.
- Von Braun, J. (1995). 'Agricultural commercialization: impact on income and nutrition and implications for policy', *Food Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 187-202.