

Globalization, World Order, and Geography¹

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The Institute of Indian Geographers has rendered me a special honour and by that token offered an enviable opportunity by asking me to deliver the Professor A.B. Mukerji (7 November 1929 to 31 January 2011) Memorial Lecture at its 39th Annual Meet, being organized at the Ravenshaw University, Cuttack. The venue is one of India's oldest educational institutions of higher learning, established way back in 1868. It takes pride in being the nursery of several distinguished dignitaries of the region.

Professor Mukerji (2000) is best known for his seminal paper titled: What ails Indian Geography? I am inclined to respond by saying: What hails Indian Geography? Testimony to this is the superb quality of research, teaching and supervision carried out by Professor Mukerji himself. To realize the depth of what I am saying, you simply have to go through the anthology of tributes, *Life Abundant*, edited by his daughter Malovika Pawar (2017). Malovika describes Professor Mukerji as a highly integrative mind, capable of rigorous scientific analysis on the one hand, and an intense appreciation of the aesthetic side of life on the other. Parvinder, his son-in-law, observed that Professor Mukerji shaped a life and left behind a legacy which is an inspiration

to us all. Professor Dikshit acknowledged that as a founder-member of the Institute of Indian Geographers, Professor Mukerji was always a pillar of strength to this institution. I expressed by personal sentiment through the words: 'Those who are loved even after their death never die'.

By virtue of his expertise in both Cultural and Physical Geography, Professor Mukerji was a rare blend of both among the Indian geographers. This could be attributed primarily to his doctoral research training at the Louisiana State University, United States. His most acclaimed contribution to Cultural Geography focused on the Jats of the Upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab, and that came to Physical Geography in the form of a variety of studies on the geomorphic landscape of the Siwalik Hills in the proximity of Chandigarh. He underlined the indispensability of field work for good research and he himself was a great practitioner of it. As a true academic, he kept his mind ever agile. He was gifted with an amazing power of memory and we virtually depended upon him as an obliging 'live bibliography'. Above all, he was a great votary of interdisciplinary work. By virtue of its stake in every discipline, Geography is best placed in this regard. He could say such things which others said later.

Professor A.B. Mukerji Memorial Lecture delivered at the 39th Annual Meet of the Institute of Indian Geographers, held at Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha, on 26-28 December, 2017.

Professor Mukerji had a global reach, his research spanned over both physical and cultural worlds, and Geography was his passion. I intend to align my presentation to what defines Professor Mukerji on these lines. I have opted for the theme of Globalization, World Order, and Geography for my discourse today.

Globalization

What does globalization stand for? This is about growing worldwide interconnectivity (Steger, 2017, p. 17). It is a process which represents integration of economies, hybridization of cultures, reconfiguration of geographic space, and sensitization to ecological issues. Economic interconnectivity signifies liberalized movement of goods and services across countries; promotion of foreign direct investment; flow of capital across borders for entrepreneurial ventures; and relaxation in international mobility of labour. Cultural hybridization refers to diffusion of popular culture, life style and world view as linked to consumerism; fusion of cross-country music, dance and other modes of entertainment; dispersal of international chains of fast-food outlets like McDonald; and the spread of English as a global language. Space reconfiguration gets manifest in the softening of the rigid boundaries of the nation-states simultaneous with an accentuation of the sentiment of nationalism; formulation of transnational political and economic arrangements; internationalization of humanitarian issues; and rise of the local. Sensitization to ecological issues covers awareness about the climate change and occurrence of extreme climatic events, the

trans-boundary pollution and disasters, and the loss of biodiversity and extinction of some species. All this is marked by a global range.

It would be wrong to assume that globalization is a recent phenomenon. It is historic one though with varying magnitude and pace through time. Before the ushering in of the modern colonial era, beginning with the discovery of Americas, most of the world was an arena of successive empires, such as the Persian, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman. All these empires were the scenes of interaction among their different segments. Trade was, of course, the strongest link, apart from cultural exchange and innovation sharing. The colonial era, spanning up to the end of World War II, witnessed an intensification of inter-linkage of the imperial powers, such as Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and Netherlands, with their respective colonies spread world over. This caused not only a massive exchange of goods but also wide dispersal of people. The process acquired a further momentum when a large number of countries gained independence after World War II. Now they were free to choose their trading, cultural and political partners, giving a push to the process of globalization.

Today globalization is a spatial frame of reference for human thought and action. Our world is getting transformed at all spatial scales of nation- state, region and locality under its impact. The term is noted for its first appearance in a book *Towards a New Education*, published in 1930 in the United States. It was only in 1980's that it got projected as an economic ideology. This marked the contemporary phase of

globalization. Led by an ideological fervor in favour of free movement of goods, people, capital and ideas, the rise of globalization has been dramatic. Technology accelerated the pace of things around. In the lead were the developed countries. In many cases they made it incumbent upon the developing countries to be a part of this regimen.

There by globalization did not remain merely a process. It took the form of an imperative. On economic front, globalization favoured liberalization and integration of markets and was affirmed as irreversible and beneficial to all. A fact was highlighted that globalization has been instrumental in bringing down the percentage of extremely poor from 50 percent in 1990 to 14 percent in 2015. This was confirmed by the *Millennium Goals Report* of the United Nations.

On the parameter of human well-being, globalization was expected to lead to accumulation of wealth in general and reduction of inequality in particular. The facts presented on these lines were as follows. In 1994, the United States and its treaty allies in Europe and Asia Pacific accounted for 72 percent of the global GDP; by 2015, this percentage had come down to 61 percent. This signified a drop in the share of the developed world in global economy and a corresponding rise in that of the developing world. Equally notable was the surge in the number of international migrants that reached 243 million in 2015, as per a recent report released by the International Organization for Migration, an agency of the United Nations. This produced a richer economic yield for the developing countries.

In political sphere, an awareness linked to globalization was seen as promoting the

cause of democracy. This did materialize. The number of electoral democracies in the world increased from 39 in 1974 to 120 in 2000. No less significant was the rise of politically active middle class world over. Middle class activism against any infirmity in governance is now a universal experience.

Ironically the proponents of the recent surge in globalization are turning their back to this process. A majority of the Americans, British and French believe that globalization has eventually proved harmful to them. This was earlier the refrain of the developing countries. There is some twist in the turn of events. The data confirms that the economic growth rate of the developing countries today is faster than that of the developed world. While the gap among the industrialized economies got reduced and that among the developing countries widened during 1950 to 1980, it widened among the industrialized economies and declined among the developing economies during 1980 to 2015. This reversal of a trend is attributed to the globalization process.

Naturally a question on gains of globalization is being raised in some quarters of Western Europe and the United States of America. Nationalism is making headway in the developed world, barring in a few countries like the Scandinavian ones, Canada and Australia. Anger against immigrants from developing countries prevails in general. They are observed as snatchers of jobs and dampers of wage levels of the locals, and are judged as misfits in the fabric of western society. Certain religious fundamentalist groups among them are singled out as a source of terrorism. In overall terms, this tide of

new nationalism is meant to safeguard the economic, cultural and demographic ethos of the western world.

Often it is not realized that technology no less responsible for the emerging scenario on these lines. Automation has reduced demand for not only blue-collar workers in manufacturing but also for white-collar employees in services. Meanwhile technology up-gradation has created highly specialized jobs for a limited number of professionals, and there is proliferation of low-income avenues in construction, petty retailing, infrastructure and other such vocations. The net result is a widening inequality in income distribution.

China offers a different kind of story. With its earnestness in favour of globalization, the country is investing heavily in several parts of the world. This is being done with the twin objective of sustaining its high economic growth rate, and also extending its political influence. It has undertaken a number of investment initiatives, such as One Belt One Road (OBOR), Asian Infrastructure Bank, and New Development Bank, formerly known as BRICS Development Bank, to this effect. The OBOR (One Belt One Road) venture deserves a bit of elaboration. This project was launched in 2013, under the flagship caption of ‘mutual benefit, joint responsibility and shared destiny’. Involved herein is a Chinese investment of no less than 900 billion dollars in 65 countries, as reported by the *Economist* in its 5 August, 2017 issue. The investment is meant for raising sea ports, highways, railway lines, power plants and other such infrastructure. The spatial spread of these projects is indeed vast, on roads from Beijing to Madrid and sea routes from Zhanjiang to Rotterdam.

China imported more than a half of the world garbage in 2016 at a cost of 18 billion dollars. This included waste paper, used plastic, scrapped metals and other such items. All this was meant to serve as raw materials for industry. The country now has an ambitious plan to extend OBOR to Polar Silk Road by developing shipping lanes, as a part of its Arctic Policy. A beginning in this direction has been made through an involvement in Russia’s Yamal liquefied natural gas project.

India is equally in favour of globalization to foster the cause of its high economic growth rate. In addition to formalizing trade relations with several countries, it is making all efforts at promoting overseas investment. While the private corporate sector investment is directed to the developed countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore and Switzerland, the public sector investment has gone largely to the African, ASEAN and neighbouring countries. These economic imprints are meant also for creating geopolitical space.

In total terms, a stark reality is that the benefits and costs of globalization were not uniformly distributed. These were subject to the export capacity or otherwise of different countries. The greatest beneficiaries of globalization have been East Asia, South-East Asia, South Asia and a large part of Africa in the developing world; Mexico, Argentina, and Eastern European countries among the middle economies; and Germany, Australia and the United States in the developed world. In case the incipient tilt toward economic nationalism continues, the biggest sufferers would be the small countries with large exports, such as

Singapore, Ireland and Netherlands. Large countries with moderate exports, such as the United States, Brazil, China, India, and Japan, will be more resilient. Obviously globalization had its play on a field which was already uneven and created a world order which was no less uneven in a new mode.

World Order

The term ‘world order’, though in common usage, is difficult to understand and define. It can be taken as an arrangement of different political entities of the world in a manner that it ensures overall stability, peace and development. The concept assumes that there is an underlying ordering principle which is acceptable or made acceptable to all.

At present the idea of world order is based upon the concept of sovereignty of individual nation-states (Kissinger, 2017). Each nation-state is empowered to use its territory and manage its affairs the way it deems most appropriate. Harnessing this virtue of sovereignty, nation-states have been grouping and regrouping themselves from time to time to serve and safeguard their political, economic and social interests. The formation of the United Nations after the World War II in 1945 was itself meant to sustain the eminence of the nation-state, among other things.

The post-World War II phase witnessed the arrangement of the world order on ideological lines, with the First World representing capitalism, the Second World pursuing socialism, and the Third World following a policy of non-alignment. Defined on politico-economic basis, such an order was meant to function as a balance-of-power strategy for pre-empting any war.

The dismemberment of the Soviet Union in 1989 is often described as a change in favour of capitalism.

Meanwhile a regrouping of various nation-states has also been taking place as guided by their economic, cultural and strategic considerations. The European Union, the Arab League, and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) are the ready illustrations on this count. Each nation-state found its interests served best in some kind of mutuality.

The world order has always functioned under the influence of some over-riding idea. For centuries it rested on an urge for empire building. This was followed by a continuing faith in the sovereignty of individual nation-states. Today globalization is the driving force. This process itself is based on the virtues of capitalism promising efficiency through efficacy of market forces and competition. A common belief is that to ensure its development every nation-state may integrate itself with the global economy at large.

Alternative modes for shaping the world order have also been conceived, advocated and even put into practice. The adherents to the tenet of socialism believe that ideal would be a world order which is founded on this ideology. This is a kind of ideological globalism. Free of infirmities of capitalism, a socialist society is projected as distinctly just and humane. As an objective reality, such an experiment did not meet with success.

At the same time there are Islamic fundamentalists who believe that most desired world order would be the one which is based on the dictates of *shariah*, or the Islamic law. Perform what *Allah* ordained

the humanity to do. This is religious globalism. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria made an effort to force things on these lines. A lot of terrorism erupted on the way. The consequences are there for everyone to see.

The Chinese model visualizes a world in harmony based on the precept of hierarchy. This they intend to demonstrate through state-driven authoritarian capitalism. Such a strategy is seen as combining development and peace. The emphasis is upon 'order' in the world order.

By comparison, the Indian model derives its strength from the idea of the 'world as a family (*vasudha ev kutumbkam*)'. Harmony among different nation-states and sub-nations within is seen as basic to achieve peace and development in holistic terms. The basic task boils down to giving a practical shape to this ideal.

The hard fact is that the episodes of envisioned world order have been rare in the history. Humanity had always more dreams than could be realized. Politics rarely had enough efficacy to manage prevalent discontent. No wonder the world order remains in transition. The United States, Russia and China are losing, or have lost their ideological and spiritual purpose (Kaplan, 2017, p. 25). The United States has become weak in its celebrated record of America as a land of opportunities, Russia is no longer a votary of socialism, and China no more takes a pride in its communism. There is a visible dent in the economic primacy of the United States. European Union has not remained as much united after the exit of Britain. China is making a significant headway in the globalization

race. The developing countries are moving faster than ever before. All are traversing the path of 'pragmatism' under the compulsions of a profound tension between economic globalization and political nationalism. Where does relevance of Geography find a place in such a scenario? This needs a bit of elaboration.

Geography

Globalization is essentially a geographical concept. In its spirit, this process embodies 'spatial interaction', and in manifestation it operates on a spatially differentiated world. By ensuring an increasing worldwide connectivity at all hierarchical scales, it has ushered in a '*place age*'. The different parts of the world have now become much more interactive, interdependent, and above all visible. As a result, a kind of '*geographical renaissance*' is being experienced in general. Human beings are evolving into geographical beings to a greater degree. One is globalized to the extent where one is located. Geography is one's destiny.

By its very nature globalization is a spatial tendency which operates under the influence of a variety of economic, cultural, political and technological factors. Therefore its impact differs by the development level, cultural background, political order, and technological advancement of different parts of the world. Nonetheless what is happening at one place is not independent of things happening at other places. The prices of gold, oil and food are no longer local. Terrorism or political upheaval anywhere has wider spatial ramifications. Climate change and disasters adhere to no political boundaries.

A basic geographical question is: How much and in which manner are the different parts of the world involved, and are being impacted upon, by the process of globalization? Which places are the gainers and which are the laggards and why? Which sectors of economy of various regions are more affected by globalization? Which sections of people in different spatial settings are under greater influence of globalization? An authentic enquiry of this nature is necessary because both strengths and infirmities of globalization are often exaggerated at different forums.

One pertinent question pertains to the impact of globalization on the world order. How was this economic ideology perceived as positive or negative in different parts of the world? In which way such an assessment changed over time? Where is globalization meeting a resistance and promoting economic nationalism? The world order has not remained the same and it is ever changing. The capacity to export and invest overseas and geographical inter-linkage between countries of origin and destination in this regard have become the defining feature of the world order today. Nation-states are now regrouping themselves on self-interest rather than ideological lines. Nationalism and protectionist tendencies in places signal some retreat of globalization. This is a temporary phase. By its very logic, globalization process is going to regain its momentum over time.

In the context of globalization, one is reminded of *thanatophobia*, or imaginary fear of death, from which geography always suffered. Globalization, perceived as homogenization of the world, was seen as leading to the demise of geography which is concerned with a spatially differentiated world. Before World War I, by which time telegraph, telephone and car had made their appearance, the fashionable phrases circulating around included 'abolition of distance' and 'disappearance of frontiers'. Wells (1940), in his book *New World Order*, tried to make us believe that with coming in of aeroplane and global communications, the era of nationhood is dead. In the same vein, Cairncross (2001), in her book *The Death of Distance*, observed that the internet powered communication will lead to irrelevance of geography. Friedman (2005) in his book *The World is Flat* highlights that as a result of globalization the world will become uniform and the very rationale of geography as a separate discipline will become questionable. Nothing of the kind happened. Globalization is the mother of both homogeneity and heterogeneity. It is rather giving birth to a new world which is much more internally differentiated than before. The emerging spatial contours of globalization offer an ever more complex world for exploration by geographers.

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