

COVID-19 and Globalization: Changing International Order and Impact on South Asia

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Abstract:

This paper is based on the recent global political development after the advent the pandemic COVID-19. Our prime focus in the paper is the South Asian region but in this age of globalization, with the pandemic itself being a risk with global connectivity, the issues in the region cannot be treated in isolation without taking into consideration some the major global players like China, U.S.A. etc in the present scenario. The central concern of the paper is to highlight some of the basic defining traits of globalization that have gone on to a mode of backlash presently. This has brought a new political order in the region challenging the ideals of liberalism and globalization. This has set the stage for new emerging patterns of risks envisaged in major social and political institutions. Our attempt here is to examine the forces of globalization and the current political development in the world in general and South Asian region in particular amidst the Corona Pandemic outbreak. Though we have accommodated instances from other parts of the world to strengthen and add more clarity to our arguments, this paper basically captures the upcoming trends and possibilities in the region and beyond to understand where we stand.

Key words: Risk Society, Globalization, Disinformation, Localization, South Asia, COVID-19

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I. INTRODUCTION:

The ongoing COVID-19 virus has turned to be the greatest health pandemic for the world in twenty-first century. The mysterious outbreak, still evolving symptoms, and its ability to quick spread have made it unique pandemic to mankind. However apart from these physiological challenges, it has also brought societal provocations from economic recession to changing geopolitical equations. Probably in the context of nation-states the biggest challenge it possesses is, its impact on globalization. This pandemic induced change in the dynamics of globalization will include alteration in all its dimensions from economic to political, from cultural to ecological. Some scholars even argue that this pandemic may cause the end of Globalization (Rapoza 2020). Globalization will end or revive in a new form is a matter of further debate but it is for sure that this pandemic will change the way globalization has marched as a juggernaut.

In the last six months the changes witnessed by the world and hindrances suffered by globalization is unprecedented in last forty years. Under economic front of globalization, multinational companies got freedom to establish industries in low cost of production state in order to minimize cost and benefit of the product was enjoyed by customers all over the world. Developed countries often own these conglomerates and developing countries get the foreign investments and employment from it. But now there is an increasing call for localization to deal with restrictions on immigration throughout the world due to the pandemic. Even various economic sectors like Tourism, Manufacturing etc have been severely affected by it. Similarly in political front globalization has arguably led to the limitation in the power of national government and boosted international institutions like United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, World Bank groups etc. But this pandemic has again strengthened the national governments to the extent that some states have witnessed the rise of authoritarian regimes. On the other hand it has weakened the credibility of global institutions like World Health Organization. Geopolitics of the globe is also transforming significantly with shift in balance of power under the influence of COVID-19.

Overall every pillars of globalization like interconnectedness, borderlessness, free flow of ideas, capital, information etc have been severely affected by this pandemic. This is because it entails a free flow of risk as well. In the next section, we tend to draw your attention to the basic characteristic traits of globalization as a process. We reiterate that the purpose is to highlight the backlash and in order to do so we underscore some of the basic nuances of this process.

We argue that with the outbreak of the pandemic some of the defining traits of globalization as a process have been backlashing in the last few months though we do not intend to presume that this trend would

continue. That's again another debate which needs to be explored as far as the futuristic evaluation of this crisis is concerned. In order to do so, we have highlighted on some of the major dimensions and distinguishing features of the process of globalization, and then we argue how this trend in the recent period of crisis has been undone in some instances.

Conceptualizing Globalization:

In the lexicon of Sociology, Globalization can be derived from the ideas of Marx on the expansive tendencies of *capitalism* and Durkheim on the geographical spread of the *division of labour* (Giddens and Sutton 2014: 21). As a nomenclature, dictionary entry for 'globalization' in its current meaning was in 1961 (Kilminster 1998: 93). Globalization has economic, political and cultural dimensions (Waters 2001). Some gives primary importance to *economic dimension* of Globalization which embeds financial exchange, international trade, decentralized production and consumption, a global division of labour and a global financial system. For others, *cultural globalization* is more significant. Robertson (1995) devised the concept of *Glocalization*– the mixing of global and local elements – to capture the way that local communities actively modify global processes to fit into indigenous cultures (Giddens and Sutton 2014). This leads to multidirectional flows of cultural products across the world's societies. South Indian *Dosa* shops in Paris and Brazilian Zumba dance in Mumbai are some common example of this dimension of Globalization. Some others, who prioritize *political globalization*, focus on increasing global and transnational governance bodies, such as the United Nations and European Union, which functions above and beyond national governments. Contemporary scholars have added Ecological and ideological dimension to globalization (Steger 2009). Ecological dimension of Globalization often connotes in negative sense like impact of climate change in general and global warming in particular. On the other hand, the ideological dimension of globalization indicates the ideological fusion and global quick spread of ideology all over the world, i.e. democratization of the globe.

Many scholars find globalization more resembles with *detrterritorialization*, according to which a growing variety of social activities takes place irrespective of the geographical location of participants. Modern innovations like revolution in telecommunication, digital computers and audio-visual media are facilitating such connectivity (Scholte and Arat 1996). Here it is important to stress that Supra-territoriality is a major dimension of globalization where social relations have traversed to those heights. Anthony Giddens talks about the difference between space and place, where the latter is a localized territory and the former refers to different nuances of space. (Giddens 2014) In the context of globalization we refer to shrinking of 'place' or territoriality and all our actions and events presumes a supra territorial dimension.

Putting it straight and simple Anthony Giddens in his book *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990: 64) defines, "*Globalization as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.*"

Moreover from these discussions we can summarize that Globalization is a process of detrterritorialization and interconnectedness of the globe from economic, political, cultural, ecological and ideological point of view. It involves the seamless movement of people, capital, services, ideas, information and so on beyond the national boundary. Most of the scholar will agree with the fact that Globalization as globalizing form of modernity marched like a unstoppable Juggernaut till last decade (Giddens 1991).

Tripartite jolts to Globalization-

However three hurdles in this juggernaut in last decade have affected the dynamics and the speed of Globalization. Even critiques have started terming it as *Slowbalization* (Economist Bureau 2019). First hurdle was *Global Financial Crisis*, started in USA after the fall of Lehman Brothers in 2007. Before this also there were economic crisis witnessed by the world i.e. Indian Balance of Payment Crisis in 1991, Mexican Economic crisis of 1994, East Asian Economic Crisis of 1997, but Global Financial Crisis was unique. For the first time the epicenter of this crisis is at the heart of Globalization, i.e. United States. It was turned to be truly global as it has impacted the whole world due to USA being the biggest economy in this interconnected global economic system. Economic dimension of globalization has faced the first global backlash during this crisis. This crisis was followed by European Sovereign Debt Crisis in 2010. The resentment against both of which has coupled together and promoted *Anti Globalization Movements* first time in the *Developed World*. It has also given rise in far right political parties and leaders in USA and Europe. Rise of Donald Trump to the United State presidency is one of such development.

Second hurdle was in form of ongoing *Trade war* from 2017 started by then US President Donald Trump under his campaign of *America First* and *Make America Great Again*. Under these, USA has raised the tariff rate for imports especially for Chinese goods which was also reciprocated by China. The spillover effect of

this trade war has to be burnt by the whole world (Ajami 2019). Thus the notion of free trade as the sign of globalization has received a severe blow out of this trade war.

However these two hurdles have given major blow to the economic sphere of globalization, while the third hurdle has more or less affected each sphere of globalization. It is current *COVID 19 pandemic crisis*, believed to be originated in Wuhan province of China but quickly the virus itself turned global traveler due to the interconnectedness of globalization (Appadurai 2020).

Politics of pandemic at International Arena:

Various contemporary developments around pandemic have created a catastrophe for the process of globalization as well as international politics. As an aggravator of colluding events it has capacity to alter global order including South Asia. Some of these events are jotted down below.

Information Asymmetrism led by China

In today's post modern era Information serves as the backbone of any national as well as global policy. It has been clear that COVID-19 as a new strain of corona virus germinated in human body from the wet market of Wuhan city of China (W.H.O. 2019). From the very beginning China was allegedly keeping the world in dark regarding the exact reports related to the origin, outbreak and symptoms of COVID-19 virus by hiding information. WHO and its chief Tedros Adhanom has also allegedly shielded China. For instance even after Taiwan has confirmed there are proofs regarding human to human transmission through virus, but WTO overlooked Taiwan and supported Chinese narrative (Times Bureau 2020). In turn missing of this vital information has jeopardized the health security of whole globe. Recent tapped phone conversation of W.H.O. officials has confirmed this conceal of information by china and dubious role of W.H.O. (7 News Bureau 2020). This whole incident has put the basic principle of globalization i.e. *free flow of information* at back foot. This asymmetric information outflow by china has unleashed first risk of COVID-19 virus on globalization. Now this matter is under W.H.O. investigation.

Disinformation and propaganda warfare

Propaganda war based on disinformation shaped by nationalist narrative has aggravated the risk. Instead of focusing on dealing with the pandemic as a health hazard, states have started themselves in engaging in the diplomatic game go blaming and counter blaming each other regarding the pandemic. United State started blaming China for the origin and spread of the virus. President Trump uses to call it *Chinese Virus* or *Wuhan virus* and later claimed that it is originated in Wuhan lab (Bishop 2020). While China countered it with new theory that US military have brought the virus from US to China and underlying intension of US to racially discriminate Chinese and obstruct Chinese growth (James 2020). Similarly in South Asia Nepalese President K.P. Oli started blaming India for the spread of corona virus without any proof (India Today Bureau 2020). These mud sledging are only meant to satisfy the domestic audience and shift the blame of own failure. Thus this Virus has triggered another debate of disinformation and false propaganda on the part of some nations to protect their vested interest. This can be a part of the massive *manufactured risk* Beck (1992) talks about. The risk is not only about health hazard of the humankind but also about the misinformation that mainstream and social media can create with fake messages and morphed images.

International Organization succumbing under Nationalistic pressure

Globalization also promotes international institution to function above and beyond national government (Giddens and Sutton 2013). These institutions like United Nations, IMF, World Bank, W.T.O. etc have batted for multilateralism and maintaining international stability in post world war world. These institutions have witnessed several challenges in terms of recession, climate change, wars, pandemic like SARS, MERS but they are able to make a synthesis between power capabilities of their participants and their mandates. However Corona pandemic has affected some of the institutions at deep root.

First institution to get hammered during any crisis linking with a major world power is United Nations Security Council. It took the council until April 9 to convene its first virtual meeting only after the persuasion by nine out of ten non permanent members. China, a permanent member as well as current chairman has resisted calls to declare the pandemic a threat to international peace and security under the UN Charter in an attempt to minimize the crisis and China's role in it (Pickering and Trivedi 2020). Thus UNSC failed to perform its duty.

Similar disruption has been witnessed by World Trade Organization (W.T.O.), even before corona crisis. Over the past two years, U.S.A. has blocked the W.T.O. from appointing new members to an appellate panel for trade disputes (New York Times Bureau 2020). Recently in the midst of corona crisis and escalating trade war W.T.O. Chairman Roberto Azevedo has resigned before the completion of his term. Before resignation he has expressed his frustration regarding the tussle of members over various issues i.e. Fisheries issue which has made negotiation standstill in the advent of corona. He has again warned the world against lack

of international cooperation to deal with corona crisis (ibid). The crisis has surely aggravated the trade disputes and disruptions already present in W.T.O.

The institution that has crumbled the most under corona pandemic is World Health Organization. W.H.O. has been clearly succumbed under Chinese pressure and has failed to perform its mandate at multiple levels. At first instead of independent inquiry it has relied on Chinese version of origin and spread of virus (Financial Times Bureau 2020). It has compounded the harm by denying Taiwan's claim on human to human transformation and went with official Chinese stand (ibid). Again at its annual meeting it has failed to award Taiwan a membership as an independent member due to Chinese pressure with respect to One China Policy. By getting frustrated with this china manic attitude, Japanese Deputy P.M. Taro Aso dubbed W.H.O. as Chinese Health Organization. US, by going one step ahead from nomenclature, have blocked the funding for the W.H.O. As US was the biggest donor, this blockage of funding has affected the efficiency of W.H.O. significantly.

To some extent I.M.F. and World Bank has performed their mandate under the pressure of COVID-19 crisis. I.M.F. and World Bank have raised \$ 50 billion and \$12 billion respectively for the fight against corona pandemic. While Eighty one countries have shouted for financial help, I.M.F. has provided immediate debt relief only to twenty five poor nations to focus on fight against pandemic (I.M.F. 2020). The amount of help is somewhere short from the financial need by the poor countries which is estimated to be \$2.5 trillion (Guardian Bureau 2020). Lack of donation by developed countries especially USA is the main cause behind this resource crunch (ibid).

Moreover the failure of these world institutions has revealed two emerging risks of the contemporary world. Firstly, the downfall of global institutions under nationalistic pressure is an indication of waning of globalization. Secondly, it has brought back the nationalism and national interest above and beyond international institutions and their mandates, which is antithesis to globalization. So we are moving into a newer form of risk society has hints at the collapsing of international institution along with national and institutions as far as social security and social insurance is covered. This not only leading to back lashing feature of globalization but entails the third pillar of risk that Beck is talking about.

Rise of authoritarian regime and the risk of liberal value system erosion

Rising wave of nationalism and power of national government in its extreme often give rise to Authoritarian regimes. This is a form of political risk that been adopted by many nations. Head of Governments in many countries have been given enhanced powers. The populations they lead have generally, increased their faith in them too (Appadurai 2020). This has led some to fear that the authoritarian regimes now in power in many countries will tighten their grip over power and dismissive of liberal political values (ibid). Hungary has turned first *corona virus autocracy* as President Viktor Orban has suspended all existing laws indefinitely by passing Enabling Act in Parliament (The Washington Post Bureau 2020). Authoritarian regimes often have a tendency to suppress information and top officials may not recognize the gravity of the situation until it is too late to prevent it (Walt 2020). For example, in China Dr.Li Wenliang of Whuan Hospital, who had disclosed the seriousness of the virus, had been arrested for spreading rumors and had died mysteriously in hospital (Cabestan 2020). This suppression of information we have said earlier. Similar trends of authoritarian regimes can be witnessed in liberal democracies. Many right-wing populists, like Trump, are responding to the crisis by tapping into racist, anti-migrants biasness and blame game with China. By following the suit President Bolsonaro in Brazil has criticized and contempt the suggestions of health professionals (Appadurai 2020). Even among south Asian countries Nepal has banned some Indian News channels and has taken a hardstand against India so that its failure to check pandemic can be disguised under nationalist sentiment. Similarly in India, Nationwide curfew is imposed to check the spreading of virus which has led to curbing of freedom of expression and resulted in brutal police assault on citizens. It can be considered as the flexing of state muscles.

These developments are clear negation to the basic premises of globalization, which is based on the neo liberal principles of democracy and stands for the free flow of information, people and capitals. These have put states and their democratic institutions under risk and the potential it has to affect liberal value system of democratic world is enormous.

Call for Localization and change in global manufacturing chain

Though globalization has called for internationalization of economy, trade actually occurs within regional groupings i.e. the European Union, the Asia-Pacific region and North America rather than within a single global context (Giddens and Sutton 2013). However long distance trade was growing faster than short distance trade relation in recent past (Altman 2020). For instance India's trade relation with US stands at \$87.95 billion where India's total trade with other SAARC members stands only at \$19 billion in 2018-19 (World Bank 2019). Interestingly, globalization which had promoted free flow of information, itself has become the victim of worldwide spread of COVID 19 awareness which has led to closure of border by almost all nation-states (Oba

2020). It has added new layer of complexity to already fragile global supply chain due to trade war and protectionism (Altman 2020). Ultimately nation-states are giving call for *Localization of economy*. Even the manufacturers are taking steps to reduce their exposure to long-distance vulnerabilities. So far, at least, financial commentators have focused on cost calculations for particular sectors: automakers worried about shortages of parts; textile makers deprived of fabric; luxury-goods retailers starved of customers; and the tourism sector, where cruise ships, in particular, have become hotbeds of contagion (James 2020). In this context Professor Beata Jvorcik, Chief Economist of European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (E.B.R.D.) thinks trade war coupled with the coronavirus pandemic, will lead companies to actually take re-shoring seriously (BCC Bureau 2020). In short and medium term, Asian countries will lose jobs, remittances and investments while western countries will witness a sharp drop in students, skilled labourers and even tourists from Asian countries. For industries this re-shoring may cause loss to companies in terms of economy of scale but will bring certainty as national policy will cater their demand and it will again give opportunity to companies to diversify their supplier base (ibid). Even after the pandemic gets over, these restrictions will surely be removed. But with this new awareness of the risks associated with the free movement of people, there will be definitely a caution with crossing borders and localization may prevail as new norm (Oba 2020). For instance India has already initiated the policy called *Atmanirbhar Bharat* or Self Reliant India. Under it Indian government has allocated 10% of its GDP to five sectors i.e. economy, infrastructure, technology driven system, demand creation, vibrant demography. It has induced much needed fiscal stimulus in the economy (GoI 2020). This package is intended to turn India a manufacturing hub with ability to fulfill the demand of own domestic market. It is envisaged to enable Indian Economy to withstand external volatility even though it will be achieved at the risk of sinking of globalization (ibid).

Geopolitical Risk in South Asia - On the ambit of strategic competition between India and China

China has the ambition of becoming superpower by grabbing the space left behind by USA under America First policy (Bishop 2020). Initially China has been condemned for maintaining secrecy regarding outbreak. To counter this narrative it has started *donation diplomacy*, by distributing medical equipments to other countries including South Asian countries (The New York Times Bureau 2020). Over the past decade, China has replaced India as the major trading partner of several South Asian countries, which was traditionally a zone of influence for India. For instance, the share of India's trade with Maldives was 3.4 times that of China's in 2008. But by 2018, China's total trade with Maldives slightly exceeded that of India. China's trade with Bangladesh is now about twice that of India. China's trade with Nepal and Sri Lanka still lags India's trade with those countries but the gap has shrunk (Live Mint Bureau 2020). It is widely believed that China is behind Nepal's aggressive stand against India (India Today Bureau 2020). It is also engaged in a tussle over border with India in Ladakh and Sikkim regions and with Bhutan in East Bhutan region (Rajagopalan 2020). Crushing democratic space in Hong Kong by extending China's national security law to Hong Kong and militarizing South China Sea is again a part to the same Chinese strategy (The print Bureau 2020). Former Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran named it as *Wolf Warrior Diplomacy* under which China gives a clear message that no one must not mess around China (ibid). Here there are two options in front of South Asian Nations, either stand like India or join the bandwagon (Live mint Bureau 2020). However despite of limited resources India is not far behind. Indian Prime Minister has organized SAARC Emergency Fund with \$10 billion donations, to enhance capability of South Asian nations to fight with the pandemic. It has also sent earlier Hydroxycloquine medicines to South Asian neighbours like Sri Lanka and Maldives (Wagner and Scholz 2020). But resource wise it has no match with China, so China is expanding its footprint in the region at the cost of India (ibid). However recently India has started supplying vaccine to all South Asian nations excluding Pakistan, as it has not requested for it. Even Myanmar, Saudi Arab, South Africa, Brazil etc have ordered Indian Vaccine. In comparison to Chinese Sinovac vaccine Indian Covaxin and Covishield got better response worldwide. Even Bangladesh has cancelled its deal with China for vaccine supply and instead requested India for it. Thus India here has registered slight edge over China in *vaccine diplomacy* (Indian Express Bureau 2021). However the economic influence of China through *Debt trapped diplomacy* may risk the strategic autonomy of the small South Asian countries. For instance Sri Lanka was compelled to give Hambantota port to China for 99 years lease as a consequence of debt trap (Var and Po 2017).

Dynamics in South Asian nations under Pandemic

South Asia is the home to 25% population of the world. Three South Asian countries are in the top 20 corona affected countries list by last week of June (worldometer 2020). It shows the gravity of the pandemic in the region. When it comes to health care it is one of the lowest performing regions. For instance in terms of hospital bed- population ratio, India has 7 hospital beds per 1,000 persons, Pakistan has 6 beds, Bangladesh has 8 beds. But when we compare with China it has 42 beds, and the United States has 29 beds (Wagner and Scholz

2020). Though India is famous for medical tourism but huge population and rapid spread of Pandemic will restrict its ability to deal with the virus.

Similarly the adherence to religion in the region has aggravated the rate of infection. In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, for example, some of the early infections could be traced back to meetings of the Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim missionary society. In India, this is likely to increase reservations about the Muslims in the country (ibid). While temples like Tirupati Temple also caused the spread of disease before getting shut due to corona (The Print Bureau 2020). As a consequence, polarization between the religious communities will probably continue to increase. Pakistan was one of the few Muslim countries whose government failed to close the mosques by mid-April due to the pressure from clergies. The reason for that was resistance from the Islamic clergy. In Bangladesh, despite the government's ban about 100,000 people gathered in April 18 the funeral of a Muslim cleric (Wagner and Schloz 2020).

When it comes Economy the abrupt shutdown of key industries, such as textile production in Bangladesh or the tourism industry in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, will drive up debt and accelerate the threat of recession (ibid). Pakistan's economy is already debt ridden, which may shout for further bailout package from I.M.F. According to World Bank, 2020 could be the worst business year for South Asia and its overall economy may halted like never before in last 40 years (World Bank 2020).

However the path to overcome this crisis for all south Asian countries may not follow the same path. Cheap export led countries like Bangladesh may likely to press for rapid integration into the global economy. While tourism led countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives may follow the same suit. They not only fear for their most important industries, such as textile production and tourism, but they also want to be able to send their workers abroad who will provide much needed remittance to these countries (Wagner and Schloz 2020). Though India receives maximum remittance in the world, but it will likely choose the other path. The crisis could reinforce the already prevailing trend toward protectionism. Indian government's decision to enhance custom duties on Chinese goods, banning Chinese applications and launching of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* is clear step towards this direction. Nevertheless India has enhanced its capacity from zero producer of PPE kit to the second largest producer of PPE kits with more than 2 lakhs production per day within two from March to May 2020. Similarly with the record production and export of COVAXIN, made by Bharat Biotech and COVISHIELD, made by Oxford-Astrazeneca with Serum Institute, India has shown the potential of its Economy and its drug manufacturing capacity to stand by self reliance (GoI 2021). However India may carve its niche in the World trade but can't be able to get isolated completely. It can be evident from India's increasing investment in neighbours, demanding more H1B visa from U.S.A. and importing Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) even from China.

Future of Globalization: Epilogue

COVID-19 may have presented serious blow to globalization which may bend the process but won't be able to break it. Both the globalization and the opposition to globalization will be here to stay (Altman 2020). Current technological shift i.e. the adoption of e-commerce, videoconferencing and robotics have all been stipulated by Covid-19. But many pandemic-induced shifts could also strengthen globalization (ibid). For example cross border e-commerce may expand its business under this epidemic, provided political farsightedness must be there to support it. Emergency medical aids have been sent from India and China to USA, Africa and European nations. The competitive race to find the vaccine, there are collaborative efforts by virologists, epidemiologists and public health experts across national boundary. For instance Oxford Astrageneca vaccine of Britain is produced with the collaboration of Serum Institute of India to produce COVISHIELD vaccine. Drug producers will rely on clinical trials on volunteers across the global pool. All these are the sign of continuation of globalization (Appadurai 2020). In the words of Appadurai "Globalization is like a horse that left the barn 30 years ago, when the Soviet Union fell, when free markets for labour and capital became the norm, and when financial markets became more important than the trade in goods and services. These processes cannot be reversed, like that of industrial revolution or the emergence of computers" (ibid). So globalization may go through a process of reorganization but reversal may not happen (Bishop 2020). For instance *webinar* may take the place of seminar and the process of interconnectedness and interdependence will continue as before but things may not be as simple as it looks. A serial risk has been unleashed. It such a massive risk that may not only re-structure the existing global order, but may induct or drop out the existing global players. Our existing social institution with its ideals and methods of practices, our trade relations and ways of doing so, our social relations, media and its values have been at risk of what scale is still unknown to us. As mentioned earlier, this global risk has the potential to destroy its creator, globalization in its existing form, though not the whole process.

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