

The multi-pronged Impact of Globalization on Bangladesh: A Critical Assessment

Rajib Haider Roman^{1*}

Abstract

Globalization the 'buzzworld' worldwide has become an integral part of the civilizational journey of mankind, with a chain-reaction linked through information, trade, culture and technology. It has three manifestations: an increased density of networks, increased "institutional velocity," and increased transnational participation. Every nation of the world has been affected by the new global change, and most have been trying to adjust or readjust to it by whatever means available to them. A developing country like Bangladesh that is in the process of completing fifty one years of its independence cannot obviously remain outside its penetrating influence. The purpose of the present exercise is to present the reader with an overview of "globalization" and its resultant effects on the national economy, politics, education, families and society in Bangladesh. The impact of globalization has brought some positive as well as negative effects on our situation. Her, it's also suggests some remedial measures for avoiding such problems arising out of the global culture.

Keywords: Globalization, Bangladesh Economy, Technology, Military and Security, Information, Environment and Sociopolitical-Cultural Track

Introduction

Since the conclusion of the Second World War the human adobe has witnessed significant modifications with profound effects on relationships at all levels across the globe. Some of the changes have been affected by dynamics such as nationalist upheaval and confrontational politics, scientific developments and technological innovation. Cross-border movement of goods and people stimulated others. All these determinants have had multifaceted ramifications on

¹ Faculty Member, Department of Politics and Governance, Gono Bishwabidyalay

* Correspondence author: Email: roman17f@gmail.com, Phon: +8801716123956

technology, military, economy, organizations, environment, sociopolitical structures or norms. The changes over the last few decades were not continuous or consistent, however, but the consequences seem very clear the emerging patterns and trends affecting a nation have taken on global dimensions. In the foregoing context it seems pertinent for a country like Bangladesh address the problems and challenges facing the country in the global age. For an appraisal and assessment of the challenges confronting Bangladesh it is imperative to have both an overview of the totality of changes occurring internationally at all different levels of global changes and then in that light address the issues pertaining to policy concerns of Bangladesh in the new century. This article is an attempt to explore the positive effects for Bangladesh in the era of globalization as well as to find out some negative effects on our situation. It also suggests some recommendation for Bangladesh to get the best out of globalization.

Objective of the Study

The study aims to explore the effects of globalization through various avenues and uncover the potential multifaceted impacts of globalization on Bangladesh. It seeks to assess the influence of globalization in Bangladesh, focusing on aspects such as the economy, environment, technology, military and security, information, and socio-political-cultural factors. By examining different facets, the study aims to determine the diverse impacts of globalization on Bangladesh.

Methodology

The article would be observational or empirical one. This paper focuses on qualitative method. This paper fully based on secondary data. Qualitative secondary data have been taken from research, books, reference Journal, seminar and working papers, local and foreign articles.

The Impact on the Economic Track

Globalization means stiff economic competition in a freer economy "in the dynamic, complex and highly competitive world" (Kibria, 2000). Bangladesh was one of the few LDCs that embarked in the early 1990s in an ambitious process of trade liberalization. These issues are important to address so as to find out whether the radical reorientation in economic policies may

have contributed to improve the economic and social prospects of the country or led to marginalization under the shadow of globalism.

The country's overall economic performance is at best paradoxical. From its birth the country has had a continuing much-publicized hangover of an image as "an international basket case." That may no longer be true, as the country, despite being the 'most densely populated non-city state in the world,' has attained near self-sufficiency in food production. Despite prolonged political unrest, and rising lawlessness, Bangladesh has achieved an average GDP growth rate of about 5% during the 1990s. And there has also been a slowing down of population growth (estimate varies from 1.6% to 2%) and low inflation (less than 3%) (Kalam, 2008).

Indeed, the sector of industry and manufacture recorded an average growth rate of 7-8 per cent growth during most of 1990s, but dwindled down to 5.5 per cent during FY 1999-2000. The overall growth of both large and medium size industries, including the major export-oriented industries, suggesting an inherent instability and vulnerability of the sector. It is viewed that loss of protective markets due to liberalization of trade regime at a rapid pace served as an important factor that of modernizing investments, low technological standards and operational inefficiencies have been the more important reasons underlying dismal performance of the industrial-manufacturing as a whole (Imtiaz, 2001).

Related to the above is the unsustainable nature of the country's economy. Mention may be made in this connection of the failure to address the rising losses of the state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which have been bleeding the Bangladesh economy profusely. One of the impacts of globalization is the drive towards privatization around the world, reinforcing pressures that encourage management to regard employees as a cost rather than an asset. It is viewed, as mentioned earlier that for nations like Bangladesh with a bloated state sector, privatization remains the gateway to more efficient resource allocation. The cumulative losses incurred by the SOEs since the country's independence are TK450 billion, Nubile those during the Financial Year 1999-2000 is known to be TK34 billion, almost an alarming 50 per cent rise in losses from the previous year, which is a matter of grave concern. There is projection that amount of losses are likely to rise further in future (Hasan, 2016). A coalition of vested interests consisting of politicians, bureaucrats, gang of trade union leaders and corrupt officials always torpedo the move to privatize or sell the SOEs, seriously constraining the budgetary programs of the government. Many SOEs

are unable to pay salaries and meet other operational costs. Even the lion's shares of bad debts of the nationalized commercial banks (NCBs) are with the SOEs. Therefore, the SOEs may be in a desperate situation looking for working capital from the nation's banking system. The question thus appeared and reappeared during the last decade how long will the taxpayers' money be abused to pay subsidies to these loss-making public

The primary industries in Bangladesh comprise textiles, sugar, cement, fertilizers, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics. Following globalization regulations set by the GATT/WTO to encourage interconnectedness, Bangladesh has reduced many tariffs and non-tariff barriers, facilitating the entry of goods from its Asian counterparts. However, there is a lack of reciprocity from trading partners, restricting Bangladeshi products from entering their markets in contravention of GATT/WTO regulations. This adherence to economic globalization guidelines outlined by GATT/WTO has enabled multinational corporations and more efficient firms from neighboring countries to penetrate the Bangladeshi market, displacing numerous local manufacturers and jeopardizing Bangladesh's economic stability. (Kalam, 2008). Consequently, the idealistic notion that globalization promotes sustainable growth seems disconnected from the practical realities faced by Bangladesh. The sheer example of the 1996-97 share-market debacle in Bangladesh is an eye opener how free market and globalization could entail pauperization process and downsizing of the capital market itself from which it is yet to recover.

The Impact on the Environmental Track

Comprised of low-lying delta and located at the elbow-point of the turbulent waters of the Bay of Bengal-Indian Ocean, Bangladesh is well known internationally for its environmental vulnerability. It is particularly prone to natural disasters with floods and cyclones, tornadoes and tidal bores being very common features. Indeed the country has been horn in the geomorphologic process of disaster and flooding. While these natural hazards have been integral part of its very creation, they are recurring with greater frequency and intensity with every passing decade. Moreover, additional hazards are cropping up. Some of them are natural and some are man-made. These include land degradation and soil erosion, drought and deforestation, siltation and drying up of the riverbeds. There are others like greenhouse effect, ozone layer depletion and sea level rise,

emission of toxic gases and chemical pollution that may be causally linked to global production and consumption behavior, and consequently to worldwide environmental degradation. All these have multifaceted effects on human health, ecosystem and environment globally.

However, disaster-prone Bangladesh particularly remains at the receiving end of much of the global environmental abuse. All of the foregoing problem areas of environment carry the urgency of policy mitigation with shared regional concerns as well as systemic thickness of interdependence. For pollution and environmental degradation are now treated very much as integral part of global agenda for action, requiring remedial measures at local, national, regional and international levels. Much of the environmental degradation and natural hazards facing Bangladesh originate from actions from beyond its borders. The greenhouse effect that contributes to sea level rise has particular ramifications for Bangladesh, as one-third of the country is projected to go under water by the year 2100 that would add fragility to the already land-starved country (Kalam, 2008).

There is another point of particular relevance to both. Globalization and misgovernance: while the constraints of both capital and technology had their compulsion of openings of her hydrocarbon sector to the MNCs like the U.S.-based oil giant Occidental, corrupt-ridden Bangladesh could do little to compel the necessary compensation for eco-environmental destruction caused by the company at Magurchara (block No. 14 of Surma basin of Moulavibazaar in Sylhet division).

The experiences of Bangladesh in its dealings over the Magurchara affair needs a little exposition for both environmental reasons and economic logic. The company signed a production-sharing accord with the concerned government agency Petro-Bangla in January 1995, discovered the Magurchara gas field, but went into drilling operations without sufficient precaution embedding mechanical installations or cautionary management skill. As a result, it caused huge gas well blazes, costing Bangladesh an entire gas reserve of approximately 700 million cubic feet, the current price being estimated at more than TK20,000 corer. The explosion caused severe damage to the tribal habitat, apart from damages done to the economy and surrounding reserve forests as well as human settlements (Bhardwaj, 2001).

This case seems so relevant in the context of an emphasis by some of the MNC managers on embracing a new manifesto for global socio-economic engagement. They insist that

governments must assure an ethical, transparent and accountable global economic environment in return and that both business and government benefit from ethical behavior (Bonsignore, 2000). Yet the behavior of the MNCs like Occidental does not seem to fit in any frame of business practice and cultural standard advocated by their business executives.

The Impact on the Technology Track:

In technology Bangladesh status appears at best stagnant, nowhere nearer to the global change. Indeed, in certain sectors, especially in the public sector of industries such as jute and textile the country is simply languishing as if it were in the earlier era of industrial revolution in Europe. And most of its public sector enterprises, whether manufacturing industries or service-oriented corporations are in the red and have been increasingly so since the independence of the country, incurring a total loss of TK. 4819 million during the year 1999-00 alone (Bakht, 2001). Even the sector of readymade garments (RMG), which is the major productive source of the country's foreign exchange earnings, is fully dependent on imported technology, with virtually none that is indigenous. The technology at work in the sector is relatively, updated—due to the demand-and-supply compulsion of its international business net, though the sector is far behind in developing its backward linkage industries. Nevertheless in an age of swift globalization when upcoming 'sunrise' industrial technology dominate at the global level Bangladesh seems set to displace itself with decaying 'sunset' industrial technology—with crumbling hazards of environmental pollution—when it compares itself with other newly industrializing countries (NIEs) of Asia most of whom are moving to higher, more sophisticated base of industrial technology. Developed countries like the U.S. and Japan moved away from this kind of industrial endeavor way back in the 1970s and early 1980s (Kalam, 2008).

What the country needs is an 'export-led growth' strategy in the context of competitive globalized world economy focusing on attainment of higher industrial technology and export of manufactures, moving much beyond Dolai Khal and Znjira-type of indigenous industrial technology. Incentives have to be provided to those private sector entrepreneurs seeking graduation into small and medium size innovative and service-oriented technologies that can be networked with enterprises in the developed Asian and western markets, as has been the practice of the entrepreneurs in many of the NIEs and Japan. Therefore, technological innovation not only needs to be encouraged,

allowing the existing private sector enterprises to graduate into higher technologies but also new talents must be encouraged through appropriate package of incentives so that the young entrepreneurs might get inducted into modern technology-based industries of the global age.

The Impact on the Military and Security Track

In military and security matters the prevailing perception in Bangladesh is that the country's major challenges emanate from the region's power asymmetry or from the 'tyranny of geography'. The country being 'India-locked' is viewed as a "hostage to its fixed geographical location" (Kibria, 2000). That kind of enemy perception often gives way to 'India-lock' policy thinking, suggesting India as an adversary and limiting the scope of Bangladesh's business maneuverability to cope with the shifting winds of globalization. Resource constraints may never enable the state to conceive of a politico-military deterrence to project its power potential vis-a-vis India. Such a constraint has to be understood in the right perspective and the country should never contemplate a confrontational strategy that would be contrary to neighborly vision in a period geo-economics. Moreover, the country's networks of historical, et no-cultural and even emotional links with India makes a confrontational strategy unfeasible. At any rate in an age of strivings for geo-economic advantage, military power projection in the guise of deterrence seems largely irrelevant (Choudhury, 2000).

What seems pertinent in the context of Bangladesh is significant strategic and geo-economic advantage due to its proximity to the two largest Asian powers, India and China—the latter a "neighbor's neighbor," next to Myanmar and even more importantly to India. With an expansion of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a grouping of 10 and inclusion of Myanmar, with the latter having warmer relations with China, Bangladesh now stands right at ASEAN's western door and is drawn still closer to China's strategic periphery. Without doubt Bangladesh finds itself as a "land-bridge" between South Asia and East and Southeast Asia, together with curbed but continuous coastline linking the vital Asia-Pacific trade and Asian strategic routes. The proposed trans-Asian highway and rail-lines will add further credence and business meanings to it. All this indicate that the country does have the geo-economic potential to reap the maximum advantage from increased trade and interaction arising from the thickness of globalism involving some of the economic powerhouses of the Asia-Pacific region. To what extent

Bangladesh is able to capitalize this advantage depends partly on its internal politico-economic strength and partly on the art of geo-economic diplomacy played out in the difficult terrain of regional and international power game (Kalam, 2008).

However, at the regional level, for the moment Bangladesh remains somewhat bogged down with the neighboring giant, despite having common membership of regional cooperative entities of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) that itself mooted and of Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC) or of subregional growth entities such as South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ) and Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). It seems unable either to fully comprehend its vital national interests or to protect/promote its strategic needs while dealing with contentious bilateral issues with the giant neighbor such as border management/fencing, population movement, demarcation of land and maritime boundaries, the sharing and/or augmentation of water of the common rivers. In an age of sub regionalization, regionalization and globalization the country even as 'the friendliest neighbor' failed to negotiate a deal for overcoming the constraints of trade asymmetry or huge trade imbalance even while allowing the latter to take full advantage of her market opening under the guise of globalization. Thus globalization serves as a magnet for market liberalization for Bangladesh, while bilateral and regional levels of relationship appear as a constraint towards sustainable growth of Bangladesh.

There are other perceived politico-security constraints, too. While a hastily signed peace accord brokered by New Delhi (1996) seemingly ended the tribal insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) (that India itself had earlier sponsored and provided sanctuary), resurgence of ethnic violence, hostage-taking etc. indicate that Dhaka has failed to harmonize the political rights and interests of various ethnic groups living in CHT. There is a looming danger of recrudescence of violence and insurgency in balance should New Delhi decide to extend its patronage to the insurgent leadership that it continues to harbor in its soil (Maniruzzaman, 1994).

Secondly, Bangladesh seems under intense pressure to open its territory for 'transshipment' of goods and services to serve the needs of the neighboring giant, though any such arrangement without reciprocal trade concessions and wider regional/global opening accommodating Bangladesh's Own growth requirements is believed to add to the fragility of security of Bangladesh.

Thirdly, Bangladesh also remains under intense pressure by quickly profit-seeking MNCs to pump its gas to serve India's energy needs, without an appropriate assessment of its own overall energy resources or a fuller appraisal of the benefit that it may gain from a better economic management.

Last but not least is the uncertain nature of the region's strategic scenario. While nuclearization by the region's power protagonists has transformed South Asia into "the most dangerous place on earth", as Bill Clinton stated during his visit to the region in March 2000, harmonization of regional interests has become almost impossible. Bangladesh is also affected by the regional arms race escalation and proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction, as is reflected in the hikes of its defense allocation and purchases (such as MIG 29's for a country with little strategic-space depth), constraining country's enhanced economic efforts to come to grips with globalization and overcome the constraints of its status as the LLDC.

The Impact on the Information Track

It is known that new digital/information technologies have become the glue of globalization, making cross-border connectivity faster, cheaper and increasingly frictionless. For Bangladesh there is a long way to go before the country can truly enter the IT age or be able to capture the IT-based world market, as it has just only 650,000 telephone connections which works out at 0.5 lines per 100 in urban areas and 0.04 per hundred in rural Bangladesh. Even most offices or establishments that have PCs the computers often find their conventional use as a replacement for typewriters. Currently, out of a population of around 127 million Bangladesh barely has an approximate 50,000 Internet users (Kalam, 2008).

In the foregoing context of a 'digital divide' affecting the country there has been a lot of noises in recent years about development of IT sector in Bangladesh, declaring it as a thrust sector, setting up a commission for development of the sector, promotion of IT related education, offering special fund allocation, tax holiday/exemption for IT companies, setting up of IT village, High Tech Parks and so on (Islam, 2000). The spread of the IT know-how in neighboring India is often cited as an example to emulate; yet the country is now to face the challenges that lie ahead in creating sustained IT awareness, putting out-of-the-way the dated invalid technologies.

It is estimated that by the year 2010 the IT business will draw \$180 billion outside the developed countries and another \$500 billion business in developed countries. Bangladesh can hope to earn \$5 billion and \$10 billion respectively from each of these business transaction should it provide the right kind of policy to the sector. It is viewed that the government need not spend any money. What it needs to do is provide policy support (Kalam, 2008). That means converting Bangladesh into an IT country, making the industry a focal point of development, not just having an IT park/village or allocation of some special fund for that matter. If Malaysia or Singapore can plan along the line why Bangladesh with a better legacy of English education and an enthusiastic youth segment to catch up could not move forward? If neighboring India can target earning US\$50 billion by exporting software and IT-related services by the year 2008 why Bangladesh having similar background and an equally enthusiastic younger generation cannot earn at least one-tenth amount by the same date?

It is pertinent to comprehend the interacting nature of the key elements of information revolution involving the technology itself, products, services, information and knowledge, as newer developments and opportunities are cropping up in the IT sector (Islam, 2000). Only a thriving information and communication technology development domestically may help the country to pursue an IT diplomacy abroad so as to suit its dual needs of economic and foreign policy.

The Impact on the Sociopolitical-cultural Track

The country's sociopolitical and cultural track is at best mixed. From ethnic-cultural point of view, Bangladesh represents a relatively homogenous society. With restoration and practice of multiparty democracy in the 1990s, and a vibrant culture—upholding and carrying forward the secular-tolerant legacies of the past, Bangladesh may conceivably place itself in the forefront of those nations who envision an enlightened future for the global community. The government is the political engine of globalization, but in Bangladesh the government has often proved to be both highly corrupt and inefficient—suffering from regime-bias, non-transparency, vacillation, and hence unable to take decision or to implement decisions. Hence Bangladesh is often described as a 'weak state' that is vulnerable to pressures of all kinds and inept

in the functioning and institutions of governance. There is thus a paradox facing political globalization in Bangladesh: while democracy is overly championed as an ideal it remains a utopia, and a big question mark hovers over the efficacy and effectiveness of democratic governance. Lingering debates persist over policy, nationalism and national culture. Dynastic-feudalistic legacies intertwined with cult-like charismatic influence, familial connections, political cronyism, monetization of power dynamics, sycophantic behavior, disregard for ethical standards and legal frameworks are prevalent in Bangladeshi politics. Consequently, the national government has lost its effectiveness and fallen under the sway of negative forces, with its ability to foster globalization severely restricted. (Zafarullah, 2003).

However, both free flow of information globally and transnational forces have inescapably had their bearings on the system of governance in the country, with both internal and external forces increasingly assuming functions of governance (Rahman, 2000). Bangladesh already features globally as 'the country of the NGOs' for their leading role in social mobilization, getting access to over one-fifth of the country's external resources. They not only encroach into the democratic realm but may also further limit the scope of democratic governance and hence of the democratic route to globalization. While professedly they serve as agents of 'civil society' in reality they most often are unaccountable and non-transparent. Most importantly, the NGOs have also intruded both into businesses as well as into the minefield of the country's politics, adding further volatility to the already fragile political system.

In the thickness of global complexity or interdependent systemic relations where very many transnational issues such as democratic legitimacy, environment, human and gender rights crisscross no nation can stay isolated any longer. The government's abuse of black laws such as Special Powers Act (SPA) and Public Safety Act (PSA) as legal tools for political repression have drawn strong national condemnation and international reaction (Baten, Globalization and Anti-Globalization, A Critique of Contemporary Capitalism and its Counter Trends, 2008). The political culture of the country remains parochial and fraught with factions. The political leadership lacks a cohesive strategic vision and is plagued by trivial personal rivalries. Consequently, while globalization has reshaped the state's role as a source of political satisfaction, social cohesion, and

poverty alleviation internationally, Bangladesh, as a functioning democracy, confronts significant challenges in managing globalization by providing effective governance, establishing a responsive bureaucracy, and fortifying the vigor of its socio-political institutions. (Rahman, 2000).

It is evident from the foregoing analyses that like many other LDCs, Bangladesh is not in comfort in coping with the winds of globalization. Perceived as one of the countries that suffers from 'soft state syndromes' Bangladesh often emerge as a captive to the transnational actors and forces, featuring helplessly at the intersection of a vast array of regional and global network of organizations. In the swiftly changing world when the forces of globalization and regionalization are spreading Bangladesh is projected "to be in a melting pot," its "political boundaries and core economic and cultural values are under threat, some subtle, some abrasive" (Rahman, 2000).

Concluding recommendation

As a nation with limited resources, Bangladesh's connections to the global system remain fragile. The various initiatives taken to engage with the global community in terms of socioeconomics, culture, and trade only serve to expose the inherent weaknesses in its systemic framework. The absence of a coherent systemic vision in policymaking hinders strategic decision-making across all levels of development, preventing the country from effectively addressing the challenges of globalization and capitalizing on available opportunities.

For a developing country like Bangladesh, the repercussions of globalization are deeply intertwined with its national economy, politics, society, and family dynamics. Embracing true democracy in all aspects is essential to leveraging the potential benefits of globalization, instilling hope, and propelling Bangladesh towards the prosperity it aspires to achieve.

Finally, globalization presents opportunities and potential: it can bring the world closer together, foster cultural exchange, and facilitate the transfer of knowledge—a universal human asset. In a borderless world, the prevalence of poverty, ignorance, superstition, and lack of values should not persist. What is essential now is not only the dissemination of microelectronic chips, but also ensuring access to essentials such as potato chips, clean drinking water, basic healthcare, and more. To achieve successful globalization, treating the global population as a unified brotherhood and

embracing a spirit of sharing and cooperation, rather than deprivation and competition, is imperative.

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