

South Asia and Dissociative Identity in the Age of Globalization

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Abstract: Globalization has altered the processes of identity formation, negotiation, and contestation in South Asia, a region characterized by a diverse array of cultures and significant historical conflicts. This dissertation examines the manifestation of dissociative identity within the framework of globalization in South Asia, specifically in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. This study utilizes secondary data and comprehensive case analyses to investigate the impact of borderland communities and transnational dynamics on individual and community identities. Theoretical frameworks established by researchers like Benedict Anderson, Arjun Appadurai, and Homi K. Bhabha offer a basis for comprehending the relationship among territoriality, globalization, and identity. This study contends that whereas globalization has promoted connection, it has simultaneously exacerbated identity fragmentation, especially in areas with intricate colonial histories and socio-political divisions.

Keywords: South Asia, globalization, dissociative identity, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh

Introduction

South Asia, encompassing Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, represents a region of immense diversity and contrasts. It is home to ancient civilizations, thriving economies, and a burgeoning population, yet remains marred by deep-rooted challenges such as poverty, ethno-religious divides, and political instability. The age of globalization has added new dimensions to the region's identity dynamics, development trajectories, and challenges, while also presenting unprecedented opportunities for integration and growth.

South Asia's nations are defined by their diversity but also by fragmented identities that often challenge notions of cohesive nationhood. Historical events such as the Partition of British India in 1947 created enduring fissures in the form of territorial disputes (e.g., Kashmir) and communal tensions. These have been exacerbated by globalization, as transnational movements of people, ideas, and technology have sometimes heightened awareness of local and cross-border identity struggles.

Internally, caste hierarchies, ethnic divisions, and linguistic differences remain sources of disassociation, as seen in movements like the Gorkhaland agitation in India or the Balochistan insurgency in Pakistan. Externally, globalization has fostered a greater diaspora engagement, where South Asians living abroad grapple with dual identities, often influencing domestic politics and social narratives in their home countries.

However, globalization has catalyzed economic growth in South Asia, it has also deepened inequality. Urban centers thrive as hubs of global trade, but rural areas often remain excluded, exacerbating socio-economic divides. Rising sea levels, glacial melting, and erratic monsoons—exacerbated by global environmental trends—pose existential threats, particularly to low-lying countries like the Maldives and densely populated deltas in Bangladesh. Furthermore, Persistent disputes such as the Kashmir issue and maritime tensions in the Indian Ocean hinder regional cooperation, limiting the collective benefits of globalization. Additionally, the spread of global cultural norms often clashes with local traditions, creating a struggle between preserving heritage and embracing modernization. Thus, in an interconnected world, a surge in protectionist and nationalist ideologies across South Asia threatens regional integration and global partnerships.

Historical Positives and Future Aspects in the Age of Globalization

South Asia's rich history of cultural exchange, trade, and innovation forms the backbone of its resilience in the age of globalization. The region has contributed profoundly to global spirituality, arts, and science, from the spread of Buddhism to the development of zero. Post-independence, countries like India have emerged as global IT hubs, while Bangladesh has become a leader in the garment industry. South Asia's diasporic communities have also played a pivotal role in bridging cultures, advancing technology, and fostering diplomacy.

The future of South Asia lies in navigating globalization's dual forces of opportunity and disruption. By fostering regional cooperation through organizations like SAARC and BIMSTEC, the region can address common challenges such as climate change, trade imbalances, and transnational security threats. Embracing technological innovation, particularly in sectors like renewable energy and digital connectivity, can drive inclusive growth and enhance global competitiveness.

Investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure will be critical to empower the region's vast youth population, enabling them to participate meaningfully in the global economy. Furthermore, leveraging globalization to celebrate South Asia's cultural diversity—through media, tourism, and diplomacy—can strengthen its soft power on the world stage. South Asia's trajectory in the age of globalization will depend on its ability to harmonize local identities with global aspirations. By embracing pluralism, fostering cooperation, and addressing inequalities, the region can transform itself into a model of sustainable development and cultural vitality, contributing meaningfully to an interconnected world.

Therefore, the region's colonial past, marked by the partition of British India, has left indelible scars on the identities of its people. In the age of globalization, these scars have become more pronounced, as transnational flows of information, culture, and economics challenge traditional notions of belonging and identity. This paper investigates the phenomenon of dissociative identity—a condition where individuals or communities navigate multiple, often conflicting, identities. This is particularly relevant in South Asia, where borders symbolize not just territorial divides but also psychological, cultural, and political separations. By examining the impact of globalization on identity formation in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, this research highlights the complex interplay between local and global forces in shaping dissociative identities.

Objectives and Methodology

1. To explore the concept of dissociative identity within the framework of globalization in South Asia.
2. To analyze the historical and political contexts that have shaped identity fragmentation in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
3. To examine the role of globalization in influencing identity in borderland communities.
4. To provide case studies that illustrate the lived experiences of dissociative identity in these nations.
5. To apply theoretical frameworks to understand the dynamics of identity in South Asia.

This study employs a qualitative approach, relying on secondary data and case studies to explore the nexus between globalization and dissociative identity in South Asia. The methodologies used include; *Literature Review*: Academic articles, books, and reports on globalization, identity, and South Asia were reviewed to provide a theoretical foundation. *Case Studies*: Three case studies were selected from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh to illustrate the phenomenon of dissociative identity. *Theoretical Analysis*: Insights from Benedict Anderson, Arjun Appadurai, and Homi K. Bhabha were applied to interpret the findings.

India and Pakistan: Disassociative Identities

India and Pakistan, two nations born from the Partition of British India in 1947, share a deeply intertwined history marked by cultural commonalities and enduring political and territorial disputes. Despite their shared heritage, the disassociative identities between the two nations have shaped their domestic and international trajectories. In the age of globalization, these identities have been both reinforced and redefined, as economic integration, technological advancements, and transnational influences challenge traditional boundaries. The creation of India and Pakistan was rooted in religious and political differences, with Pakistan emerging as a homeland for Muslims and India adopting a secular framework. This partition led to mass migrations, violence, and deep-seated animosities that continue to shape national identities. Both nations have since used these disassociations to define themselves in opposition to each other. India's identity as the world's largest democracy contrasts with Pakistan's struggles with military influence and political instability (Gupta, 2012).

Similarly, Pakistan's emphasis on Islamic identity differentiates it from India's religious pluralism (Shaikh, 2009). Globalization has paradoxically reinforced these disassociative identities. Media, technology, and the diaspora have played pivotal roles in both bridging and deepening divides. For instance, Bollywood and cricket have acted as cultural connectors, but nationalist narratives in films and sports often amplify antagonism (Thussu, 2002).

The digital age has also heightened identity politics. Social media platforms have become arenas for disseminating nationalist rhetoric, exacerbating tensions. Globalization has created opportunities for economic interdependence, yet political disassociations have often hindered cooperation. Trade between India and Pakistan, which could have fostered mutual growth, remains minimal due to enduring political hostility. The South Asian diaspora has contributed to redefining identities in the global context. Indian and Pakistani communities abroad often interact, highlighting shared cultural heritage. However, they also carry the baggage of historical animosities, influencing lobbying efforts and foreign policy in host countries like the United States and the United Kingdom (Shukla, 2003).

The future of India and Pakistan's disassociative identities in the age of globalization depends on their ability to balance historical grievances with contemporary realities. Initiatives like cross-border trade, people-to-people exchanges, and collaborative efforts on global issues such as climate change could redefine their relationship. Furthermore, embracing a pluralistic approach to identity that acknowledges shared histories rather than emphasizing divisions could pave the way for regional harmony. Globalization offers both challenges and opportunities for India and Pakistan in addressing their disassociative identities. While it has reinforced divisions through media and political narratives, it has also created avenues for dialogue and cooperation. By leveraging the interconnectedness of the globalized world, both nations have the potential to move beyond historical disassociations and towards a future of mutual respect and shared progress.

The partition of British India in 1947 created a profound rupture in the identities of those living in the Punjab borderlands. The sudden and violent creation of India and Pakistan as separate nations left millions displaced and estranged from their ancestral lands. In contemporary times, globalization has reintroduced cross-border interactions through trade and cultural exchanges, but the scars of partition remain evident in the dissociative identities of the border communities.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) helps explain how national identities were constructed post-partition, often at the expense of regional and local identities. Modern communication technologies have allowed people in Punjab's Indian and Pakistani sides to reconnect, but this has also highlighted the dissonance between their shared cultural past and present political realities. Pakistan's tribal areas, particularly the regions inhabited by Pashtuns, have historically been zones of contestation. The Pashtun identity is shaped by tribal affiliations, Islamic traditions, and a sense of autonomy that often clashes with the Pakistani state's efforts to integrate these areas into the national framework. Arjun Appadurai's concept of "scapes" (1996) sheds light on how globalization has introduced new flows of ideas and resources into the tribal areas, challenging traditional power structures. Increased connectivity and migration have allowed Pashtuns to establish transnational networks, but this has also led to a fragmentation of their identity as they navigate between tribal, national, and global influences.

Bangladesh: The Chittagong Hill Tracts and Indigenous Communities

Bangladesh, a nation born out of its struggle for self-determination in 1971, has long grappled with the challenges of integrating its diverse ethnic and cultural identities. Among the most prominent examples of disassociative identities within the country is the situation of the Indigenous communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). These communities, comprising Chakma, Marma, Tripura, and others, have historically faced marginalization, conflict, and cultural erasure. In the age of globalization, the dynamics of their identities have undergone complex transformations, influenced by transnational movements, global media, and economic changes.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts, located in southeastern Bangladesh, are home to various Indigenous communities distinct in language, religion, and culture from the Bengali Muslim majority. The post-independence nation-building process prioritized a homogenous Bengali identity, sidelining the Indigenous peoples' diverse traditions and aspirations. The government's attempts to settle Bengali populations in the region and impose cultural uniformity triggered decades of conflict, culminating in the CHT Accord of 1997, which aimed to address autonomy and development concerns (Mohsin, 2003). Despite the accord, challenges remain, as many promises regarding land rights, self-governance, and demilitarization have not been fully implemented. The persistence of disassociative identities in the CHT reflects a broader struggle to balance national integration with cultural pluralism.

The age of globalization has introduced both opportunities and threats to the Indigenous communities of the CHT. Globalization has led to increased economic activities in the CHT, particularly through tourism, resource extraction, and infrastructure development. While these projects promise economic growth, they often come at the cost of displacing Indigenous communities and threatening their cultural heritage. For example, the construction of dams and logging operations has disrupted traditional livelihoods (Adnan & Dastidar, 2011). However, globalization has also enabled Indigenous groups to access international platforms, advocate for their rights, and connect with global Indigenous movements. Organizations like the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) have amplified their voices, highlighting issues such as land rights and cultural preservation.

The proliferation of digital media in the age of globalization has had a dual impact. On one hand, it has provided Indigenous communities with tools to document and share their culture, preserving their heritage. On the other hand, mainstream narratives in Bangladeshi media often perpetuate stereotypes or exclude Indigenous voices, reinforcing their disassociation from the national identity. While globalization has introduced external cultural influences, it has also enabled Indigenous communities to assert their identities through hybrid forms. Traditional practices are being reinterpreted and adapted to contemporary contexts, ensuring cultural resilience despite homogenizing pressures. Despite global attention, structural inequalities persist, limiting Indigenous communities' access to education, healthcare, and political representation.

Moreover, the global demand for resources has intensified land disputes, as Indigenous territories are increasingly encroached upon for economic development. The spread of dominant global and national cultural norms risks diluting Indigenous traditions, particularly among younger generations exposed to mainstream education and media. The future of the Indigenous communities in the CHT depends on their ability to navigate the opportunities and challenges of globalization. Strengthening the implementation of the CHT Accord, promoting inclusive development, and recognizing Indigenous rights within the national framework are essential steps toward reducing disassociative identities.

Additionally, leveraging global networks and transnational advocacy can amplify Indigenous voices, pressuring the government to address longstanding grievances. By embracing a model of multiculturalism that celebrates diversity rather than imposing uniformity, Bangladesh can foster greater harmony and integration, ensuring the coexistence of its Indigenous and national identities.

Apparently, The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh are home to diverse indigenous groups such as the Chakma and Marma, whose identities have been marginalized by the dominant Bengali national narrative. The globalization of indigenous rights movements has provided these communities with platforms to assert their identities but has also exposed them to new forms of cultural and economic pressures. In the age of globalization, the Indigenous communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts stand at a crossroads, facing threats of marginalization while finding new avenues for asserting their identities.

Addressing their disassociative identities requires balancing national development goals with cultural preservation and empowerment. By integrating Indigenous perspectives into the national narrative, Bangladesh can move toward a more inclusive and equitable society. Homi K. Bhabha's notions of hybridity and ambivalence (1994) explain how indigenous groups in the CHT negotiate their identities amidst competing pressures. While globalization has amplified their voices on the global stage, it has also led to the commodification of their cultures, creating new challenges for identity preservation.

Discussion and Analysis

Firstly, Globalization has redefined the ways in which identities are constructed and experienced. In South Asia, where colonial legacies and partition histories have already fragmented identities, globalization has added new layers of complexity. For instance, the proliferation of digital media allows for greater cross-border communication, but it also exacerbates feelings of alienation among those who feel disconnected from the dominant national narratives.

Secondly, Borders in South Asia are not merely physical demarcations but also sites of intense identity contestation. As seen in the case studies, border communities often experience dissociative identities, torn between their historical ties and contemporary national affiliations. The Punjab border, the tribal areas in Pakistan, and the CHT in Bangladesh illustrate how globalization complicates these dynamics by introducing new transnational influences.

Thirdly, Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's work, this paper argues that cultural hybridity is a defining feature of dissociative identity in South Asia. Individuals in borderlands often embody multiple cultural influences, resulting in ambivalence and fragmentation. For instance, the Pashtuns in Pakistan navigate tribal, Islamic, and global identities, while the indigenous communities in the CHT balance their traditional practices with the demands of a globalized world.

Fourthly, State-driven narratives of nationalism play a significant role in shaping identities in South Asia. These narratives often clash with the lived experiences of people in borderlands, creating a disconnect that globalization

further accentuates. For example, the Bengali nationalism promoted by the Bangladeshi state marginalizes the indigenous identities in the CHT, leading to dissociative identity experiences.

Conclusion

The age of globalization has brought both opportunities and challenges for identity formation in South Asia. While it has enabled greater connectivity and cultural exchange, it has also intensified identity fragmentation, particularly in borderland communities. The case studies from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh illustrate the complex interplay between globalization, territoriality, and identity. This paper underscores the need for nuanced approaches to understanding and addressing dissociative identities, recognizing the historical and cultural specificities of South Asia.

Future research should explore the role of grassroots movements and transnational networks in mitigating identity fragmentation, offering pathways for more inclusive and holistic identity frameworks in the region.

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