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The Changing Socio-Cultural And Livelihood Pattern Of The Tribal People In The Context Of Globalisation: With Reference To Soha Village Of Tirap, Arunachal Pradesh.

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Abstract

The idea of 'the world as one family' and the 'Global Village' has become more of a reality with the advent of globalisation and technological advancement. Indeed, travelling within the country as well as international travel has become a routine experience. Globalisation has made nations increasingly interdependent, whether in the transfer of raw materials, food, technology, ideas, or other resources. However, disruption in ecosystems and supply-chains are often perceived as unhealthy for development, as they may cause imbalances in the country's economy.

Globalisation not only impacts the economy but also brings socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural changes in everyday life. For instance, cultural globalisation propelled by a country's soft power – such as Yoga in India - has had a tremendous influence on culture and livelihood worldwide.

The present paper attempts to study the pros and cons of globalisation and the changing livelihood patterns that shaping the lives of the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh, particularly the Phong Nocte of Soha village.

Keywords: Global Village, Phong Nocte, ecosystem, supply-chain, Soha.

Introduction

Globalisation brings both positive and negative impacts on people's lives. Due to globalisation, it has become easier to mobilise resources, technology and ideas from one place to another. Undoubtedly, globalisation has made life more convenient and comfortable, and it has also brought people from different places and nations closer. At the same time, however, it has also caused significant changes and challenges, affecting traditional lifestyles, cultures, and economies.

Since the present paper is an attempt to study the socio-cultural and livelihood changes in the lives of tribal people of Soha village of Tirap, Arunachal Pradesh. To contextualise these changes, it is therefore important to provide a brief overview of the village.

Soha village has been inhabited by the Phong Nocte community since time immemorial. The customs, laws and traditional belief systems have been transmitted orally from one generation to another. Administratively, Soha functions as a circle headquarter, located approximately 26 kilometres from Deomali town. As of September 2025, the village consists of 169 households (data obtained from PRI members).

Earlier, governance within the village was vested in the authority of king or chief. However, with the introduction of the Panchayati Raj system in 1997, under the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1997, and in alignment with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, the governance system underwent drastic changes. It has been observed that while the implementation of Government policies has

accorded Panchayat members a significant role. On the other hand, king and elder members of the village continue to wield considerable influence over issues related to customs and traditions.

Objectives

The present study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the socio-cultural changes brought about by globalisation in study village.
2. To analyse the livelihood transformations of the study village.

Methodology

The study is primarily qualitative in nature, relying on both primary and secondary sources. Informal interviews with villagers, and interactions with PRI members provided first-hand insights into socio-cultural and livelihood changes. Secondary data was gathered from government reports, academic writings, and news articles to contextualize the findings.

Socio-Cultural and Livelihood Changes

Traditional Land Use

It has been observed that most of the tribal population are deeply rooted in their ancestral land, forests and forest products. The same is true for the tribal people of the village, Soha. In the village, land is traditionally regarded as community land. An individual cannot own or claim the land rights. In earlier times, if necessary, people even vacated their farm land to allow others construct houses. However, with the spread of modernisation and the growth of a market-based economy, customary practices are gradually changing. There are undeclared customary laws that have become the new-normal. People are increasingly attempting to claim land ownership due to the fear of exclusion and the opportunity cost associated with not having land.

Occupation and Farming Practices

The majority in the village population is engaged in agriculture, with most households practicing mixed-cropping through jhum cultivation. Farmers produce a wide variety of organic food items and vegetables, including paddy and millet. Traditionally, this form of cultivation was primarily intended for subsistence. However, over time, farming practices have evolved, with women playing an active role in transforming age-old patterns. With the introduction of market-based economy, villagers now cultivate their jhum land not only for household consumption but also for the commercial purposes.

In recent years, agriculture focus has shifted toward the cultivation of diverse crops such as taro (lengku), green beans (daklaat), sweet potato (khu-khom), yam (khu), black lentils (phengtup), chilli (ti-tok), garlic greens (nukta laasoi), pumpkin (kummen), white gourd (kumpong), ginger (cheng) and mustard (nukta-jongkang), among others.

Surplus agricultural produce is marketed in the nearby town of Deomali, reflecting a gradual shift toward market integration. Women, in particular, have emerged as significant economic actors, actively participating in the sale of agricultural produce in the market. Field investigations reveal that, on favourable days, farmers can earn between Rs. 2,000/- to Rs. 3,000/-, depending on the availability of produce.

Furthermore, the study found that the cultivation of betel leaf (waangdak) was historically a prominent economic activity, facilitating trade with the communities in Assam, particularly in Margherita town. However, this practice has declined due to the reduced survival rate of betel leaf plants, leading to the discontinuation of cultivation and trade.

Housing Pattern

The village of Soha comprises approximately 169 households. Traditional houses in the village are predominantly kutchra structures constructed using a combination of small and large timber, bamboo and palm leaves. Bamboo and cane ropes are commonly employed to bind the structural materials together. Until recent decades, house construction was a communal practice. However, contemporary villagers increasingly refrain from participating in communal construction, preferring instead to seek wage labour for sustenance.

With the advent of modernization and the expansion of a market-based economy, this traditional system of communal house construction has gradually declined. Furthermore, villagers now increasingly opt to construct their houses using reinforced cement concrete (RCC). Although building with RCC is more expensive, the majority of houses in the village are semi-pucca, built with tin-roof, bamboo or timber

wall reinforced with cemented pillars. This transition has been further accelerated through the introduction of the PMAY-Gramin programme, implemented by the Government of India. As of now, 126 out of 169 households have been completed (according to the data obtained from PRI members).

Language and Dialect

There are approximately 30-50 distinct languages/ dialects in Arunachal Pradesh. In Tirap district, Noctes can be sub-divided based on their dialects. They are: Hawa-Hakhun, Phong, Olo, Tut, Wancho, and Khapa. The inhabitants of the study village primarily speak the Phong dialect.

With globalisation, the use of Hindi as a common language has gradually increased. As M. Panging Pao noted in his article “Hindi: Arunachal’s new mother tongue” published in The Arunachal Times on 2 June, 2024, “This preponderance of Hindi as the language of choice is gradually leading to Hindi replacing native languages as the common language. Today most children prefer Hindi over native languages”. This observation reflects a broader sociolinguistic shift in which Hindi is increasingly prioritized over indigenous dialects, especially among younger generations.

Such a trend raises critical questions regarding the impact of globalisation and modernization on the cultural identity of tribal societies. These changes have resulted in the declining usage of the local dialect and the replacement of local vocabulary with Hindi or English. Unfortunately, within the Phong dialect, especially in Soha village, this declining trajectory in the use of local dialect is also evident. The table below provides examples of local vocabulary and their replacements with Hindi/ English equivalents:

Table 1. Examples of local vocabulary and their replacements

Village	Soha		
Sl. No.	Local Term	Replacement Term	Derived from
1	Ninu/ Niwa	Mummy/ Papa	Mummy/ Papa
2	Rangsa-Potdi	Ghori	Ghadi
3	Chumdaang	Chamus (Ladle)	Chammach
4	Winlak	Mok	Mug
5	Si-Ngi Wey	Saaki (Lamp)	Chaki (Assamese)
6	Phaamkom	Cyken	Cycle

Moreover, in recent times, most parents prefer relocating to nearby towns such as Deomali rather than remaining in their villages. One reason is that they want to provide their children with better educational opportunities. These changes also result in a notable reduction in the transmission of local knowledge and skills in mother-tongue languages. Studies indicate that parents generally prefer their children to learn Hindi or English in school as proficiency in these languages is considered essential for upward mobility and social recognition. Since teaching in many schools are predominantly conducted in Hindi, which further helps promote Hindi as a link medium. Indeed, if tribal people have to compete with the non-Arunachalis, proficiency in multiple languages is essential. Nevertheless, the preservation and mastery of local languages remain equally important, as language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a creator of social identity.

Indigeneous Knowledge System

Paang

Traditionally, the village dormitory, which functioned as a learning institute, has witnessed a significant decline in its role. Nevertheless, the Soha village continues to maintain log-drum, locally known as Thum, within the Paang. The Log-drum has historically been employed for multiple purposes, including convening meetings at the village level, signaling ominous events, making announcements and serving as a medium of social communication, particularly during festivals. For instance, during such occasions, male youths and elders assemble at the Paang to beat the log-drum, producing resounding rhythms. These beats often follow distinctive patterns and hold considerable cultural significance. Some of these rhythms are

identified as Woo-Doc Thum, Wey-Roc-Ron Thum, and Chaang Thum. However, contemporary youth possess limited knowledge of this practice, and participation among younger members of the community has declined substantially.

Saa-waa

In Soha, the term Saa-Waa denotes “singer”. Within the context of the Loku festival, the term Saa-Waa refers to an individual who performs songs during the festival. The songs are sung in Khapa, a dialect not commonly used in village, making it difficult to acquire and transmit. The lack of interaction and cultural exchange between the elders and the younger generation has contributed to a significant generational gap. This gap has manifested in weakened social cohesion, misunderstandings, and a decline in the transmission of traditional knowledge.

The study further reveals that there are no traditional singers remain alive within the village who possess proficiency in Khapa, thereby restricting continuity. Consequently, the absence of traditional singers in the village has diminished the cultural depth of the Loku festival, reducing it to a mere celebratory occasion rather than a holistic expression of heritage and identity.

Salt Spring

The village possesses two natural salt springs: Korok-Soomjong and Ngongwa-Soomjong. In the local dialect, Soom denotes salt and Jong denotes water. These springs were named after their discovery by two prominent families, the Korok and the Ngongwa, respectively.

Historically, the villagers extracted salt from these springs through a labor-intensive and highly traditional process. Salt production was strictly gendered, as women were not permitted to collect salt water from the springs. Beyond their utilitarian function, the salt springs also held cultural and spiritual significance. They were regarded as sacred sites, and there was a ritual that required villagers to offer prayers by breaking three branches from a plant whenever they passed the springs.

With the widespread availability of industrially produced salt in the market, the traditional practice of salt-making progressively declined and eventually fell into disuse. Consequently, the cultural and ritual significance historically ascribed to the springs was gradually eroded, culminating in the complete cessation of the associated practices. What once constituted an integral element of communal life and identity has thus been relegated to the realm of historical memory, marking an irreversible transformation in the socio-cultural landscape.

Jong-ruc

Jong-ruc in Soha dialect refers to a traditionally regulated fishing practice carried out in the freshwater rivers within the village territory, primarily as a ceremonial practice. This activity was generally organized by the youth of the village, usually during the months of September or October each year. Participation was communal in nature, involving men and women, as well as boys and girls, who collectively engaged in fishing.

Historically, fishing was conducted using indigenous and sustainable methods across three rivers of the village, namely Dangmaan, Tichap and Barak. In this practice, villagers - particularly the youths – collected locally available stupefying plant products, commonly referred to as Chaang, and applied them in the rivers. The most widely used toxins were derived from Ngoi-ti, the fruits of a large tree species. These natural compounds did not kill the fish but temporarily paralysed them, thereby enabling villagers to capture fish by hand with relative ease.

In recent times, however, this traditional practice has largely been discontinued. Increasingly, villagers have adopted unsustainable fishing techniques, most notably the use of using battery inverters, which pose a serious threat to the riverine ecosystem. Such methods not only disrupt aquatic biodiversity but also strip the activity of its collective and cultural significance, reducing it to an individual endeavour devoid of traditional fervor.

Conclusion

Tribal society of Soha village is undergoing rapid transformations in their traditional practices of communal land use, subsistence farming, and indigenous housing patterns under the influence of modernization and globalization. Increasingly these practices are being replaced by individualized ownership, market-oriented cultivation, wage labour, and modern construction techniques. Similarly, the gradual decline of indigenous knowledge systems in Soha- whether through language erosion, the loss of traditional practices such as Saa-Waa, traditional salt making practices, and Jong-ruc, or the reduced

participation of younger generations- reflects a broader challenge faced by many indigenous communities today. Although such changes create new economic opportunities, they also pose significant threats to cultural continuity, social cohesion, and ecological sustainability.

The study reveals that most villagers favour reforms in customary land rights, particularly those that streamline processes and grant individuals ownership rights. However, they simultaneously express concern over the continued erosion of traditional practices and cultural values. It is evident that much of this cultural decline stems from the gradual loss of knowledge. While many villagers express willingness to participate in the revival of cultural practices, they often lack the necessary skills and resources, particularly Generation Z, tend to show less interest in cultural preservation.

The way forward requires a careful balancing development with cultural preservation. Policies should safeguard land rights, promote sustainable farming, and encourage housing models that integrate with modern safety with traditional values. Equally important is the documentation and revitalizing of local dialects and customs. Collaborative efforts among communities, government, and scholars can ensure inclusive, sustainable, and culturally sensitive development.

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