

INTRODUCTION

GLOBALISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON SRI LANKA

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The articles appearing in this special issue are slightly revised versions of a number of papers presented at a conference on "Globalisation and its Impact: Social, Economic and Cultural Dimensions", organized by the National Science Foundation, Colombo, in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Foundation, in 2001. These papers by no means cover all the important aspects of the theme. The authors nevertheless deal with some highly relevant issues regarding the impact of globalisation in the context of Sri Lanka.

Globalisation is both an idea as well as a fact. It is widely believed, today, that the world is getting more and more integrated in economic, social, political and cultural terms. This is also a fact, because we can measure global integration in terms of measurable indicators such as the extent of migration and travel, export and import trade, transmission of cultural goods and information across the globe, spread of ideas, values and social practices, and structural change of national economies. It is an idea because the actual changes occurring in different parts of the world may not necessarily correspond to any particular model of globalisation. In fact, there are divergent views about what is going on around the world. Discussions about globalisation, therefore, tend to be guided by either objective facts or subjective perceptions or both. It is also noteworthy that the debates on globalisation are not simply based on objective, scientific criteria and considerations. In this regard, interests, ideas and values are often as important, if not more. This does not, however, mean that the globalisation process cannot be or should not be examined in terms of objective facts. For instance, the nexus between globalisation and economic liberalisation is an important issue due to its mutually interdependent or reinforcing nature. This issue can be examined as an empirical fact, in the light of empirical data. Yet, both these processes have become controversial, in particular with regard to their diverse consequences. The discussions and debates,

both theoretical and empirical, have already resulted in a large body of literature. Yet, the interest in the theme continues to grow, as the process of globalisation itself unfolds unabated, impinging on the lives of more and more people, even in hitherto remote parts of the world.

The impact of globalisation is an issue that has been investigated at different levels. Some investigations look at how it unfolds on a global level, by examining global or transnational processes. Others take countries or societies as the units of observation. Still others look at how local level communities are affected by processes associated with globalisation such as information revolution, migration, spread of values and consumption patterns, and structural adjustment. All these are important investigations that contribute to our understanding of the nature of the process of globalisation.

The papers included in the present issue deal with the impact of globalisation on a national level. The authors use national level data to examine the issues they have chosen for empirical investigation. The papers are written by five scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds and therefore, they not only look at several different aspects of the impact of globalisation but also adopt different methodological approaches.

Chandra Rodrigo in her paper examines how Sri Lanka's labour market has undergone change under the impact of economic liberalisation, which is inextricably linked to Sri Lanka's integration into the global economy. She identifies the major changes in the labour market, both positive and negative, in particular the trend towards increasing casualization of the labour force. This, naturally has significant, long term, social implications.

H. M. Thenūwara's paper examines the macro-economic impact of globalisation in the case of Sri Lanka. While recognizing the importance of economic reforms, the author goes on to identify other factors that facilitate economic growth under globalisation.

H. D. Karunaratne's paper on 'globalisation, service sector expansion and income inequality' examines an important aspect of economic change under economic liberalisation in Sri Lanka, namely the expansion of the service sector and its implications for income distribution. He points out that the service sector has been the fastest growing sector of the economy, ahead of productive sectors, contributing to a worsening of income inequality in the country.

The paper by Anula Attanayake deals with the position of Sri Lanka in the global cultural landscape. While recognizing the dominant influence of global culture industries, she argues that the encounter between local and global culture does not necessarily have to be a one-way process.

And finally, Manique Gunasekara in her paper on the 'internationalisation of British English and Sri Lankan English', advances the argument that growing dominance of a single standardized English across the globe threatens the survival of national standards that distinguish the varieties of English used in different countries including Sri Lanka. This she sees as a direct outcome of the globalisation process facilitated by global institutions and new communication technology. This development no doubt has significant social and cultural implications.

As mentioned at the outset, the papers in this special issue do not cover all aspects of the impact of globalisation on Sri Lanka. They nevertheless deal with several important dimensions and raise a number of significant issues for discussion and further analysis on the basis of empirical research. It is hoped that the papers provide a sound basis for discussion and debate as well as further investigations. Given the fact that globalisation itself is a continuing process, it will continue to attract the attention of academics, policy makers and other citizens of the country and elsewhere, hopefully leading to a better understanding of the issues involved.