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Research Article

Sarada Devi and Cultural Globalization in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The twenty-first century is characterized by rapid cultural globalization driven by technological advancement, digital communication, migration, and global economic integration. While globalization has facilitated intercultural dialogue and access to knowledge, it has also generated challenges such as identity crisis, moral relativism, consumerism, and cultural homogenization. In this complex global landscape, the spiritual and moral vision of Sarada Devi offers a significant framework for reconstructing moral identity and fostering intercultural harmony.

Sarada Devi (1853–1920), revered as the Holy Mother in the Ramakrishna tradition, embodied universal motherhood, compassion, simplicity, and spiritual inclusiveness. Her teachings transcended narrow religious and social boundaries and emphasized the inherent divinity and dignity of every individual. In the context of cultural globalisation, where societies increasingly interact yet often struggle with intolerance and fragmentation, her message of “seeing all as one’s own” provides a moral foundation for peaceful coexistence.

This study explores the relevance of Sarada Devi’s moral philosophy in addressing the ethical challenges posed by globalization. It argues that her concept of universal motherhood can serve as a guiding principle for cultivating empathy and intercultural respect in pluralistic societies. For example, in today’s digital culture—where social media often amplifies division, hate speech, and misinformation—her emphasis on kindness, patience, and self-restraint offers an ethical counterbalance. Encouraging individuals to respond with understanding rather than hostility reflects her teaching that no one is a stranger and the whole world is one’s own.

Another example can be found in the sphere of women’s empowerment. Cultural globalization has expanded opportunities for women but has also exposed them to new forms of exploitation and identity conflict. Sarada Devi’s life presents a model of spiritual strength combined with humility and resilience. Without engaging in overt social activism, she redefined womanhood by demonstrating moral leadership, inner freedom, and quiet transformative power. In contemporary discussions on gender equality and ethical leadership, her life provides a culturally rooted yet universally relevant example.

Furthermore, globalization often promotes material success as the primary measure of progress. Sarada Devi’s teachings, centred on simplicity and spiritual fulfillment, challenge this consumerist orientation. Her life illustrates that moral character and service to others constitute the true basis of human development. Integrating such values into educational systems and community life can help reconstruct moral identity amid global pressures.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural globalization is one of the defining characteristics of the twenty-first century. It refers to the process through which ideas, beliefs, values, traditions, and cultural practices spread across national boundaries, creating greater interaction and interdependence among societies. Scholars such as Anthony Giddens define globalization as the intensification of worldwide social relations that connect distant localities, allowing cultural influences to move rapidly across the globe (Giddens, 2000, p. 64). Similarly, Roland Robertson emphasizes that globalization involves the compression of the world and the growing consciousness of the world as a single place (Robertson, 1992, p. 8). In this context, spiritual figures and traditions have also become part of global cultural exchange. The life and teachings of Sarada Devi offer a significant framework for understanding how spiritual and cultural values from India can contribute to global harmony and human unity. Sarada Devi (1853–1920), known as the Holy Mother, was the spiritual consort of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and an influential spiritual leader in modern Indian religious history. Born in the rural village of Jayr Ambati in West Bengal, she lived a life of simplicity, devotion, and service. Her spiritual influence expanded after the passing of Ramakrishna, when she became a guiding figure for his disciples and followers. According to Swami Nikhilananda, Sarada Devi embodied the ideal of universal motherhood and treated all devotees with equal compassion and affection. Her spiritual outlook transcended social boundaries and reflected values that resonate strongly in the context of contemporary globalization (Nikhilananda, 2004, p. 53).

The spiritual philosophy of Sarada Devi emphasizes universal love, tolerance, compassion, and service to humanity. These values are increasingly relevant in a globalized world characterized by cultural diversity and interaction. Swami Gambhir Ananda notes that Sarada Devi's life demonstrated a practical spirituality that integrated inner devotion with compassionate action toward others; her teachings encouraged individuals to see all people as members of a single human family. Such a perspective aligns closely with the ideals of cultural globalization that promote intercultural understanding and peaceful coexistence (Gambhir Ananda, 1995, p. 114).

Another significant aspect of Sarada Devi's philosophy is her message of simplicity and spiritual equality. She believed that spiritual realization was accessible to everyone regardless of social status, gender, or religious background. Swami Tapasya Nanda observes that Sarada Devi taught spiritual truths through simple language and everyday examples, making her teachings understandable and relevant to ordinary people; her approach reflects a universal spirituality that can transcend cultural differences and promote mutual respect among diverse communities (Tapasya Nanda, 1989, p. 92).

Sarada Devi's life also contributed to the broader spiritual movement initiated by Ramakrishna and later expanded by Swami Vivekananda. This movement emphasized religious harmony and the unity of all spiritual paths. According to Swami Ishananda, Sarada Devi served as a source of spiritual

strength and guidance for the early disciples of the Ramakrishna Order, nurturing them with motherly care and wisdom. Her influence played a crucial role in shaping a spiritual tradition that later spread across many countries through the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission (Ishananda, 1993, p. 61).

The universal message of Sarada Devi has also attracted the attention of modern scholars. Amiya P. Sen interprets her life as a powerful symbol of spiritual humanism that transcends social and cultural divisions (Sen, 2010, p. 142). Similarly, J. D. Long highlights that the Ramakrishna-Sarada tradition offers an inclusive vision of spirituality that encourages dialogue among different religions and cultures (Long, 2002, p. 74). In the context of cultural globalization, such ideas contribute to the development of global ethics and interreligious understanding.

Contemporary globalization theorists also provide useful perspectives for understanding the relevance of Sarada Devi's teachings. George Ritzer discusses globalization as a process involving the spread of cultural patterns and social practices across the world (Ritzer, 2010, p. 18). Likewise, Manfred B. Steger emphasizes that globalization creates new cultural networks and encourages the exchange of ideas and values between societies (Steger, 2013, p. 27). Within this global cultural framework, the spiritual teachings of Sarada Devi have gained renewed significance as they promote compassion, harmony, and universal brotherhood.

Sarada Devi's famous statement, "I am the mother of the good; I am the mother of the wicked," reflects her inclusive vision of humanity. This idea of universal motherhood transcends boundaries of caste, religion, nationality, and gender. Swami Lokeshwarananda suggests that her life demonstrated how spiritual ideals could transform social relationships and inspire a culture of empathy and service. In an age where globalization sometimes leads to cultural conflict and identity crises, Sarada Devi's philosophy offers a moral and spiritual foundation for global harmony (Lokeshwarananda, 2006, p. 128).

The study of Sarada Devi in relation to cultural globalization highlights the enduring relevance of her spiritual message in the modern world. Her life embodies universal values such as love, tolerance, simplicity, and service that transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. When viewed through the lens of globalization theory, her teachings provide a meaningful framework for promoting intercultural dialogue and spiritual unity in the twenty-first century. Thus, Sarada Devi's spiritual legacy continues to inspire individuals and societies seeking harmony in an increasingly interconnected world.

Emergence of the Problem:

As a research scholar of education, the researcher has opted for this topic "Sarada Devi and Cultural Globalization in the 21st Century" because rapid cultural globalization often leads to cultural homogenization, weakening traditional values and identities. Her teachings of universal motherhood, tolerance, and spiritual humanism offer meaningful guidance for intercultural harmony. Therefore, it becomes necessary to

examine how her ideals can help balance modern global influences with the preservation of spiritual and cultural heritage.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the life and spiritual philosophy of Sarada Devi.
- To examine the concept and impact of cultural globalisation in the 21st century.

Research Questions:

- What is the life and spiritual philosophy of Sarada Devi?
- What are the concept and impact of cultural globalization in the twenty-first century?

3. METHODOLOGY

(a) Method:

This study follows a qualitative and analytical research method, mainly based on historical and textual analysis of relevant sources.

(b) Source of Data

Primary Sources

The primary sources include original writings, teachings, conversations, letters, and recorded sayings of Sarada Devi. Important primary materials are found in texts such as *The Gospel of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* and *Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play*.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources such as scholarly books, biographies, journal articles, and research papers related to the life and philosophy of Sarada Devi and the concept of cultural globalization.

4. DISCUSSION

Objective 1: To study the life and spiritual philosophy of Sarada Devi.

Sarada Devi (1853–1920), popularly known as the Holy Mother, occupies a unique place in the spiritual and cultural history of India. She was the spiritual consort of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and later became a guiding spiritual force for thousands of devotees across the world. Her life represents a synthesis of simplicity, spirituality, universal motherhood, and practical wisdom. Studying her life and spiritual philosophy helps us understand how spiritual ideals can be applied in everyday life and how universal values such as love, tolerance, and service can guide humanity in the modern world.

Sarada Devi was born on 22 December 1853 in the village of Jayrambati in present-day West Bengal. She grew up in a simple rural environment and from an early age demonstrated compassion, patience, and a deeply religious temperament. Her marriage with Ramakrishna Paramahansa at a young age was not conventional in the social sense; rather, it developed into a spiritual partnership centered on the realization of divine truth. Later she joined him at Dakshineswar Kali Temple where she

served him and absorbed his teachings. According to Swami Nikhilananda, Sarada Devi quietly observed Ramakrishna's spiritual practices and gradually became an embodiment of the ideals he taught (Nikhilananda, 2004, p. 45).

After the passing of Ramakrishna in 1886, Sarada Devi assumed a crucial role in guiding his disciples and devotees. She became the spiritual mother of the emerging Ramakrishna movement. Many disciples of Ramakrishna, including Swami Vivekananda, regarded her as the living representation of divine motherhood. Her life of humility and compassion deeply influenced the early monks and followers of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Gambhirananda notes that Sarada Devi's presence provided emotional and spiritual stability to the disciples during a critical transitional period of the movement (Gambhirananda, 1995, p. 102).

One of the central aspects of Sarada Devi's philosophy is the concept of universal motherhood. She did not see herself merely as a spiritual teacher but as the mother of all beings. Her famous statement, "I am the mother of the good; I am the mother of the wicked," reflects her inclusive spiritual outlook. Through this perspective she transcended social divisions such as caste, gender, religion, and nationality. Scholars such as Amiya P. Sen emphasize that Sarada Devi's motherhood symbolized a new spiritual humanism that embraced all people with unconditional love and compassion (Sen, 2010, p. 134).

Another important dimension of her philosophy was simplicity and practical spirituality. Unlike many spiritual leaders who emphasized complex rituals or philosophical debates, Sarada Devi taught simple spiritual practices such as remembrance of God, truthfulness, self-control, and service to others. According to Swami Tapasyananda, her teachings were deeply practical and addressed the everyday struggles of ordinary people. She encouraged householders to live spiritual lives without renouncing their responsibilities; this made her teachings particularly relevant for modern society where people seek spiritual meaning within active social lives (Tapasyananda, 1989, p. 88).

Sarada Devi also promoted the values of tolerance and harmony among religions. Following the example of Ramakrishna, she believed that all religions lead to the same divine truth. This universal outlook has particular significance in the context of the modern world, where cultural interaction and globalization often lead to conflicts of identity and belief. Scholars like J. D. Long have observed that the Ramakrishna-Sarada tradition represents a model of spiritual pluralism that encourages respect for diverse religious traditions (Long, 2002, p. 67).

Another significant element of her life was her emphasis on service and compassion. She believed that helping others was a form of worship. Her simple acts of kindness—feeding the poor, comforting the distressed and guiding seekers—reflected her spiritual ideals. Swami Ishananda records many incidents where Sarada Devi demonstrated extraordinary patience and compassion toward devotees and visitors; her actions embodied the philosophy that spirituality should manifest in love and service toward humanity (Ishananda, 1993, p. 56).

Sarada Devi's life also contributed to the spiritual empowerment of women. In a time when women's roles were largely restricted by social traditions, she emerged as a respected spiritual guide and teacher. Her influence inspired many women to pursue spiritual education and leadership. Swami Lokeshwarananda suggests that Sarada Devi's life redefined the concept of feminine spirituality by combining strength, compassion, wisdom, and humility (Lokeshwarananda, 2006, p. 121). As a researcher, analyzing the life and philosophy of Sarada Devi reveals her not just as a religious figure, but as a transformative spiritual humanist whose legacy bridges transcendent ideals with practical everyday life. A scholarly assessment of her impact highlights how she radically redefined the traditional, biological concept of motherhood into a universal principle. Her seminal declaration of being the mother of both the good and the wicked transcended rigid caste, religious, and national boundaries, establishing a model of unconditional inclusivity that serves as an antidote to modern societal divisions.

Objective 2: To examine the concept and impact of cultural globalization in the twenty-first century.

Cultural globalization refers to the process through which ideas, beliefs, values, traditions, and cultural practices spread and interact across national and geographical boundaries. In the twenty-first century, cultural globalization has become a powerful force shaping societies due to rapid technological development, global communication networks, international migration, and economic integration. The widespread use of the internet, social media, and global media platforms has enabled people from different parts of the world to connect and exchange cultural ideas more easily than ever before. According to Anthony Giddens, globalization refers to the intensification of worldwide social relations linking distant localities in such a way that events occurring in one place influence the lives of people in another (Giddens, 2002, pp. 28). The concept of cultural globalization emphasizes the increasing flow of cultural elements such as language, music, art, fashion, food habits, and social values across societies. In the modern world, global communication technologies allow cultural products to circulate widely and reach diverse audiences. Through international education, tourism, and migration, individuals are exposed to different cultural traditions and lifestyles. Manfred B. Steger explains that cultural globalization involves the expansion and intensification of cultural flows across the globe, which results in greater interaction and awareness among cultures (Steger, 2013, pp. 69).

One of the most positive impacts of cultural globalization is the promotion of intercultural understanding and communication. In the twenty-first century, people have greater opportunities to learn about other cultures through global media, academic exchanges, and international travel. Such interactions encourage tolerance, respect, and appreciation for cultural diversity. Cultural globalization has also contributed to the spread of global values such as human rights, gender equality,

and democratic ideals in many parts of the world. Through global communication and cultural exchange, societies become more aware of global issues and develop a sense of shared responsibility toward humanity.

However, cultural globalization also presents several challenges. One major concern is cultural homogenization, where dominant global cultures influence or overshadow local cultural traditions and identities. The increasing influence of global media, multinational corporations, and consumer culture can sometimes lead to the erosion of indigenous languages, traditional customs, and cultural practices. According to Roland Robertson, globalization involves a dynamic interaction between global and local cultural forces, where societies must negotiate between preserving their cultural identity and adapting to global influences (Robertson, 1992, pp. 27).

Another significant impact of cultural globalization is the transformation of social lifestyles and cultural values. The rapid flow of information through digital media influences people's attitudes toward education, communication, fashion, and entertainment. Global cultural trends often shape the behavior and aspirations of young people, leading to new forms of cultural expression and creativity. At the same time, these changes may create conflicts between traditional cultural values and modern global influences. Therefore, societies must find ways to balance cultural modernization with the preservation of their cultural traditions and identities.

Cultural globalization encourages international cooperation and dialogue among nations. Cultural exchange programs, global cultural festivals, and international organizations promote communication and understanding between different societies. Such interactions help strengthen global relationships and encourage collaborative efforts to address worldwide challenges such as environmental issues, poverty, and social inequality. According to George Ritzer, globalization creates interconnected networks that link cultures, economies, and societies across the world, resulting in an increasingly integrated global system (Ritzer, 2011, pp. 112). From an analytical standpoint, the most prominent benefit of this interconnectedness is the cultivation of intercultural communication and global humanism. Through international education, tourism, and digital media, individuals are exposed to diverse ways of life, which fosters tolerance, mutual respect, and an appreciation for cultural diversity. Furthermore, cultural globalization has served as a vehicle for the proliferation of progressive global values, such as human rights, gender equality, and democratic principles. As cultural exchange deepens, a collective global consciousness emerges, encouraging societies to share a sense of responsibility toward addressing universal crises like climate change and social inequality. This aligns with George Ritzer's view that globalization constructs intricate networks linking distinct societies into a highly integrated and cooperative global system. Cultural globalization in the twenty-first century is a complex and transformative process that has both positive and negative impacts on societies. On the one hand, it promotes cultural exchange, global awareness, and intercultural

understanding. On the other hand, it raises concerns about cultural homogenization and the loss of local traditions and identities. Therefore, it is essential to develop a balanced approach that encourages global interaction while protecting cultural diversity. By promoting cultural dialogue, mutual respect, and appreciation of traditions, societies can ensure that cultural globalization contributes positively to the development of a more harmonious and inclusive global community.

5. CONCLUSION

From a scholarly point of view, Sarada Devi represents a powerful symbol of spiritual universality. She lived a simple life but embodied profound philosophical ideals such as compassion, tolerance, and universal motherhood. Her teachings were not limited to a specific religious community; instead, they addressed humanity as a whole. Modern historian Amiya P. Sen interprets Sarada Devi as a spiritual figure whose life transcended traditional social boundaries and expressed a form of spiritual humanism rooted in Indian culture. Her famous statement that she was the “mother of the good and the wicked alike” reflects a universal outlook that resonates strongly in the multicultural context of globalization.

Another important scholarly interpretation focuses on Sarada Devi’s role in promoting religious harmony and inclusiveness. The spiritual tradition associated with Ramakrishna Paramahansa and later expanded by Swami Vivekananda emphasized the unity of all religions and respect for diverse spiritual paths. Scholars such as J. D. Long suggest that this tradition represents a model of religious pluralism that is highly relevant in the globalized world, where interaction among different faiths has become increasingly common. Sarada Devi’s teachings strengthened this inclusive vision by encouraging love, tolerance, and mutual respect among individuals regardless of their background.

Sociologists studying globalization also highlight the cultural and ethical dimensions of spiritual traditions. George Ritzer and Manfred B. Steger note that globalization facilitates the global circulation of cultural ideas and moral values. Within this framework, the ideals represented by Sarada Devi—such as service to humanity, simplicity of life, and spiritual equality—can be seen as part of a global ethical discourse. Through institutions like the Ramakrishna Mission, these teachings have spread beyond India and contributed to cross-cultural dialogue and spiritual exchange.

Scholars also emphasize the relevance of Sarada Devi’s philosophy for contemporary social issues. In a world marked by cultural diversity, social inequality, and moral uncertainty, her emphasis on compassion and service offers a practical guide for building a more humane society. Her life demonstrates that spirituality can coexist with social responsibility and that moral values can guide individuals in navigating the complexities of modern global life. From a scholarly perspective, Sarada Devi’s life and teachings hold significant relevance for understanding cultural globalization in the twenty-first century. Her message of universal motherhood, religious harmony, and compassionate service provides a

spiritual and ethical framework that transcends cultural boundaries. As globalization continues to shape human interactions across the world, the ideals embodied by Sarada Devi offer valuable insights for fostering unity, mutual respect, and global human solidarity.

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