

Globalisation and Democracy

Articles

By Jimmy Dabhi

The basic tenets of globalization are to remove borders, restrictions and create a free movement of people and resources. However, the globalization we have at hand is that of economics where finance and trade are expected to have borders and restrictions of movements. This proclaimed globalisation is contradiction in terms because it restricts the freedom of movement of labour, knowledge and technology. This globalisation allows goods to be moved from one part of the world to the other but not labour force. Labour movement is considered as liability for the developed countries, and therefore, strict, stringent migration and visa restriction.

Globalisation and democracy are not opposed to each other but the way globalisation is conceived by the rich countries (especially the USA, the UK and some countries of EU) and by the rich in our country is anti-democratic.

Globalisation has come to mean global trade and financial transaction out of the control of the State and under the dictates of the market. The assumption is that free market will enhance trade and economy and thus the well-being of all. The last decade and a half has proved the well being of a few and a curse for millions - for example, the collapse of the South Asian tigers of 1990s, the impoverishment of African countries, and the increase in disparities between the rich and the poor in Asian countries including India.

Market is based on the principle of demand, supply and competition. A market does not operate on its own. It is a human made system. It is selective. Those who have resources can enter the market, and those who do not are rejected. Therefore, those who have and have in plenty manipulate the market as well as the demand and supply within the market. Competition therefore is unfair and between unequal partners and the small players are eliminated from the market. The small, domestic and indigenous trade and product does not stand much chance to be in the market. The debate and conflict in the WTO negotiations are centred on how to manipulate the world market in the interests of a few countries and the rich within those countries. It is a cutthroat business where the democratic principles and the well-being of all do not have a role to play and the first countries to violate these norms are the USA and EU. India is no better when it comes to fleecing our neighbouring countries with regard to trade.

Free market for profit

Free market is supposed to remove the monopoly of any one player but experience suggests that globalisation has brought in the monopoly of the Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and World financial institution like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. They control domestic, national and global economy and thus the State becomes a ploy in their hands and in danger of losing its sovereignty. In other words, economy controls the politics of the world and the nation state. Monopoly and democracy are contradictory in terms but the present profit-oriented globalisation encourages monopoly and undermines democracy and sovereignty of other countries. The attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq in recently and on Vietnam in the past are the crude

examples of this hegemony of USA and UK. The UN stood helpless in front of these powers. Love for democracy is the justification for these attacks and wars but the real motives are oil, natural resources and big business (arms supply, reconstruction, relief supply) that can be established in times of war. The internal conflict of some of the African countries like Rwanda, Burundi, Chad are in many ways the result of profit driven markets, a kind of development paradigm supported by the big powers, MNCs, Mafia, including WB and IMF. The right wing political parties within these countries are ardent supporters of such a development where blood, sweat and suffering of the millions are justified if a few can enjoy the fruits of this development.

Democracy is a system of governance, which is in the hands of people to govern and develop themselves. Globalisation as it is operating today is violating democratic principles and reducing democratic spaces for people to participate, protest and prevent.

The evils of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation are resisted all over the world and at the same time they are gaining ground in all spheres of national and international life. These forces have changed the character of world economy as well as that of the socio-cultural and political life. Globalisation, as advocated, is undervaluing democracies across the world, and often seems to replace that old dictatorship of national elites with new dictatorship of international finance.

For millions of people globalisation has not worked, not for our Dalits, Adivasi, Muslim minorities, backward castes and communities. Many have actually been made worse with their jobs destroyed, their habitats trampled upon, and making their lives more insecure. They feel increasingly powerless against the forces beyond their control. They have seen their democracies undermined and their culture eroded. Terrorised and forced by state coercive powers, dominance of large financial institutions and the criminalized polity have compelled some to take to arms and are branded as 'terrorists', 'naxals', 'maos', by the so-called custodians of democracy, national security and integrity of the nation state. Democracy itself is hijacked by a few for their vested interests. Hitler is an example of a recent past and Bush and Modi are living examples.

Propoganda

Harold Dwight Lasswell argued that democracies need propoganda to keep the uninformed citizenry in agreement with what the specialized class had determined was in their best interests. This seems to be true in today's world. The rich countries and elite of our country use democracy to further their interests. The present conflict in Nepal is to restore democracy, democracy, which is not at the mercy of the king. The demand of the people including the Maos is for people's power, gone are the days of king and queens. Our Sangh Parivaris would not be totally against the rule of the kind because it suits their ends – the domination of Hindutva, the high caste and elite, the fundamentalists, the fascist. The USA troops will be very happy to send their forces to eliminate the Maos. Anyone who voices people's concern and agenda have to be branded as terrorist, Naxals and Maos. One needs justification to suppress people's voice. Fascist forces in India like the Sangh parivar need cultural Nationalism (another name for Hindu Rashtra) to eliminate the Muslims who then have to necessarily be branded Islamic terrorist by Bush, Blain and BJP to kill them.

Governments do not always act in the interests of people at large. Indeed, they are frequently sectarian in their actions and interventions as they seek to promote or to protect the interests of the classes, or groups, whom they represent. Sometimes, if not often, they may manipulate on behalf of groups who can exercise influence. Many governments of the Third World including India have given red carpet welcome to liberalisation and privatisation, the two pillars of globalisation. South Asian, African, Latin American experience suggest that globalisation as promulgated by the rich nations have not benefited the poor countries and the poor within these countries. The Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, the poor, the marginalised, landless and unorganised labourers, the fisher folks of India are not against development or globalisation. But they do condemn the lopsided globalisation, which is anti-poor, anti-labour, against sustainable development and disrespectful of subaltern cultures. People want globalisation, which not only liberalises trade and finance but also allows free movement of labour, knowledge and technology. People want globalisation, which ends the regime of patents and discriminatory visa and migration policies. People want globalisation, which protects and enhances local resources and increases people's ownership and access to them. People will encourage globalisation, which enhances people's power to decide and to work for their own development.

People will merely reject profit centric globalisation in favour of people centric globalisation. People will reject market, which objectifies human beings especially the poor, the Adivasis, the Dalits, and women in particular. People across the globe will always reject globalisation dictated by the USA, the European Union, the WB and IMF and big player within WTO, their strategies and framework which benefit a few and impoverish billions. People understand market and welcome market, but a market for people and not people for the market. People welcome the market, which is not discriminatory - on caste, class, sex and religious basis. People reject market promoted by a new globalisation, which opens avenues for human trafficking, child and cheap labour, for sexual tourism, depletion of natural resources, displacement and deprivation.

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Jimmi Dhahi is the director of Indian Social Institute