

Globalization: The Future of Human Rights

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has now become a reality and is here to stay and rule the future economies and lives of people across the globe. The new economic policies that emerged in the wake of liberalized markets have driven the states away from its constitutional mandate of welfare and social justice. Social justice has become the first casualty of globalization. During 18th century imperialism had a physical form. Today the imperialism manifests itself in different guise. That is the international financial institutions exercise control over poorer ones in a more subtle way, through the instrument of economic policies.

I GLOBALIZATION AND THE STATE

The agenda of WTO and TRIPS makes it clear that the multi-lateral agreements concerning global trade under the cover of liberalization, globalization and privatization have relegated the labour laws, environmental standards, vital services like health and education etc to secondary position, thus depriving millions of people in the developing world their genuine human rights. As rightly pointed out by Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer, “In the guise of trade our freedom is being traded, by signing the TRIPS India would be surrendering and succumbing to a hidden agenda in the form of corporate Bill of Rights, to the detriment of economic interest of the country. Today, State is no more the prime actor in the macro- economic policies. The prime actors are World Bank and its other financial allies. These financial institutions are not democratically elected. They are not accountable or responsible to anyone. But their policies affect the futures of two-thirds of human kind.

Economic globalization policies as enforced by the World Bank, IMF and the WTO have far more to do with creating poverty rather than solving it. What we need are organizations biased towards the poor and which address the problem of workers and of human rights. A report by the UNDP 1999 found that inequalities between rich and poor within countries and among countries are quickly expanding and that the global trading and finance system is one of the primary causes.

A close look at the structural adjustment programs driven by the free trade ideology and their impact on the national economies need a close look:

- (a) Removal of tariffs – small industries existence will be at peril
- (b) Removal of domestic laws – global financiers enter the national market may slow down foreign investment
- (c) Elimination of price controls – essential goods like food, water etc, become marketable commodities unchecked increase prices of essential goods.

- (d) Imposition of Wage controls – loss of social security support to the labour class.
- (e) Reduced role of State in social service sector – introduction of privatization of public which were hitherto extended by the state services.
- (f) Enforcement of IPR regime – developing states lack R & D facilities – no mechanism for protection of traditional knowledge from the onslaught of patents.

Agriculture sector is one of the worst hit of globalization. Nearly half of the world population even today lives directly on the land. They emphasize growing staples and a mix of diverse crops and they replant with indigenous seed varieties that their communities have developed over centuries. The period of marketisation has witnessed the dis - empowerment of labour on several dimensions like weakening of trade unions, decline in social security measures etc. The globalization with its allies liberalization and privatization have wider ramifications and repercussions on the social, legal, ethical, cultural and economic lives of the people. The developing nations have not yet fully geared up themselves to meet the challenges thrown out by the open market system.

II THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The UNDP’s Human Development Report 1997 provides evidence of how globalization and the systematic violation of human rights go hand in hand. Its statistics provide gloomy confirmation of the fact that many countries are worse off today than they were one, ten or thirty years ago and that the global distribution of income is the worst it has been for at least three decades. The report indicates that in 1997 thirty developing countries have registered a decline in their human development index, a construction based on life expectancy, literacy and income. And the share of the world’s poorest 20 percent in global income is only 1.1 percent down from 2.3 percent in 1960.

The UDHR 1948 is a landmark document passed under the auspices of UN General Assembly which embodies the basic human rights in the field of civil, political, economic, cultural lives of people. This historic document expresses its concern for securing certain human rights which are essential for the progress of people and the development of nations across the globe. The Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Covenant on Economic Social and Political Rights of 1966 have given legal shape to Human Rights expressed in UDHR.

Every human being irrespective of his race, religion, sex, place of birth etc., is entitled to these rights, whatever are the political ideologies or the economic globalization need a special mention. They are as follows:

- (a) Right to life and liberties
- (b) Freedom from slavery and compulsory labour
- (c) Right to equality before law
- (d) Right to recognition as person
- (e) Right to work
- (f) Right to education
- (g) Right to health
- (h) Right to enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work
- (i) Right to social security
- (j) Right to culture
- (k) Right to adequate standard of living
- (l) Right to development

III HUMAN RIGHTS- CHALLENGES

The constitutions of all civilized states have given expressions to these rights in their respective constitutional documents. The aftermath of globalization which induced free market policies has given a set back to the human rights of millions of people living in the developing world, as the new strategies and the structural adjustment programs adopted by the developing nations have been running counter to the interests of the people. For instance, liberalization of trade meant the least amount of governmental interference as possible.

It is needless to state that, the new economic policies that emerged in the light of liberalized markets have driven the state away from its constitutional mandate of welfare and social justice. Human rights are such fundamental freedoms which are inalienable and inseparable from the human personality and existence that, deprivation of the same to the citizens of a nation will make it a weak nation, how so ever strong it may be otherwise. The current state policies which are running in tune with the globalization are showing telling effect on the human rights of the people in many a ways. Following are some of the

formidable challenges posed by the globalization to the movement of human rights which need to be addressed effectively:

- (a) The health services
- (b) Education for all
- (c) Environmental protection
- (d) Operations of multinational corporations
- (e) Agricultural sector and the issues of farmers
- (f) Intellectual property rights regime
- (g) Protection to domestic industries
- (h) Disinvestment policies
- (i) Labour and social security
- (j) Consumerism

IV PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS – THE FUTURE AGENDA FOR ACTION

In a way, globalization posits a challenge to the concept of nation – state. In the changed scenario of liberalization policies, dominating the economies, the state has assumed a new role as a player. However, it should not be lost sight of that, a state has certain constitutional mandates and basic duty to protect the democratic fabric in which the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights and the schemes of socio-economic justice will not be subservient to the international or external forces. As long as the few rich industrialized countries decide and dictate exclusively all matters relating to global trade and commerce, fiscal and monetary transactions which are also of vital concern to the rest of the world representing 3/4th of the world population, globalization would amount to the hegemony and domination of a few over the rest of the world. Such a global system, where prosperity of few depends on exploitation of the many, amounts to the very negation of the concept of universal human rights.

It should not be forgotten that WTO is about negotiation in international trade, it is not a unilateral character of demands. The developing nations should, accordingly enter into strategic alliances and work out the policies to suit their own domestic markets. For most people globalization is an emotionally charged word. To its critics it is the unwelcome face of capitalism, a process by which the rich countries subjugate the poorer economies and then a return of colonialism. Economic globalization policies, as enforced by the World Bank, IMF and the WTO have far more to do with creating poverty rather than solving it. What we need are organizations biased towards the poor and which address the problems of workers and of human rights. In this direction following suggestions are made:

- (a) A multilateral agreement against hunger should be included, assuring the right to food for the people, which is a basic human right.

- (b) Strict legal controls should be imposed on MNCs
- (c) Real investment should be promoted and financial speculations should be minimized.
- (d) There should not be any imposition of wage controls.
- (e) Privatization of crucial service sectors like education, health, etc should be discouraged.
- (f) There should not be any compromise on the social security schemes, which are the backbone for the teeming millions of work force

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