Alternatives to Globalisation : A Search

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I. Introduction

Colonial capitalism prevailed in the world from the close of the 15th century to the middle of the 20th century. Towards the latter half of the 19th century, there arose nationalist movements in various colonies which led to the ‘liquidation of the ‘colonial power structure’1 in the post-Second World War era. As the colonies were underdeveloped during the colonial period, there was a ‘revolution of rising expectations’2 in the peoples of the Third World. This generated a strong demand for ‘development’ in these countries. The so-called ‘developmentalism’3 survived in the Third World from the 1950s to the 1970s. But from the 1980s onwards it was relegated to the background by neo-liberal ‘globalisation’.4 During the era of globalisation the world in general and the Third World in particular witnessed multidimensional social and environmental hazards, calling forth ‘alternatives to globalisation.’5 In this paper, we propose to address the threats of globalisation, the rise of resistance or anti globalisation movements and the search for theoretical as well as practical alternatives to globalisation.

II. Why Alternatives to Globalisation?

GLOBALISATION was introduced in the 1980s as the panacea for all the socio-economic ills of the modern world. The Transnational Corporations (TNCs) were the main force behind its promotion. They through the neo-liberal academia, sermoned the Third World that the engine of ‘economic growth’ resides in a liberal globalised market and the resultant outcome would generate an enabling environment for resolving such socio-economic problems like poverty and inequality.6

Multilateral institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) were employed as the agencies entrapping the Third World into the project of’ globalisation.7 A ‘Washington Consensus’ was arrived at by the neo-liberal forces to legitimise and engineer market driven programmes to facilitate flexible and free mobility of TNCs all over the world, transcending the national political boundaries. The ‘world’s leviathans’ succeeded in demolishing most of the alternative political, economic and social spaces of global capitalism.

Unfortunately, from an experiential viewpoint, globalisation was found unleashing multiple threats to the survival and meaningful development of the human race. The following is a brief discussion of the ill-effects of globalisation.

II. 1 Economic Impact

From the economic point of view globalisation has been imparting several hazards:

II. 1.1 Deepening Poverty and Widening Inequality: From the time of the very inception of the UNO, poverty eradication and narrowing the economic distance between the more developed and less developed countries have been proclaimed as its topmost concerns. Towards achieving these, in the late 1940s, regional study groups like the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) were constituted. Later the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was instituted to achieve these objectives. From the 1960s onwards various ‘development decades’ were observed to bridge the gap between the rich and poor countries. In the 1970s the UNO proposed a ‘New International Economic Order’ (NIEO) to promote economic and social justice in the world. Of late the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were suggested to contain the problem of acute poverty in the world. In spite of all these attempts, one could notice only aggravating poverty and mounting inequality between the haves and have-nots, intra-nationally and inter-nationally. Globalisation has only accentuated these maladies.

In most of the Third World countries, except China and India, the macro economic performance under neo-liberal globalisation was disastrous. Even in these countries, though the national and per capita income showed remarkable progress, inequality between the rich and the poor got widened, making globalisation very unpopular and immoral. Suicides and poverty deaths have become regular occurrences in the Third World countries including India.

II. 1.2 Deepening Indebtedness and Uneven Development: The emerging international economy is a ‘Casino economy’, where the main transactions are in money and finance per se, which have nothing to do with the ‘real’ economy. These make the whole world economy very unstable. **The 1997-98 East Asian Monetary Crisis** may be cited as an example. Most of the Third World countries are now in a ‘debt trap’.

II. 1.3 Labour, Employment and Unemployment: ***While globalisation is very friendly to ‘capital’, it is so unfriendly to ‘labour’***. Labour is downgraded to a mere commodity. So it has lost its protective cover. Hire and fire has become the norm. The trade union is made redundant. Unemployment is swelling.8

II. 1.4 Growing War Economy: Market relaxation and state compression were projected as the main pillars of neo-liberal globalisation. But one could notice an expanding state in the armaments sector in all countries. While the world now annually spends $ 900 billion for military, the assistance towards development only amounts to $ 50 billion.

II. 2 Political Impact

Neo-liberal globalisation has a political twin in ‘neo-conservatism’ (neocons). America claims to be its patron. Neo-cons argue for their version of ‘democracy’. If a state fails to succumb to this they can brand it as a ***‘rogue state;***’ legitimising their armed intervention in it. Iraq is such a case.  
Under neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism national polities are pruned and conditioned to oblige to American diktats. In the changed political scenario, the Third World governments are made accountable to global capital interests and not to the interests of the people who have given them the power to govern.

II. 3 Social and Cultural

Globalisation inflicted a mortal blow to the ‘community’ and thereby vanishing ‘humanity’. Materialistic and demonic values like selfishness and violence are displacing humanitarian values. Immorality is breeding under the cover of globalisation.

II. 4 Environmental Holocaust

One grave threat of globalisation is on the human environment. ‘Our common future’9 is increasingly under threat. Globalisation enables the wicked and the powerful to rape our ‘mother earth’ with serious consequences for the future.

III. Resistance Movements10

DUE to the above mentioned toxic effects of globalisation various types of resistance movements at different levels have cropped up in almost all parts of the world, The following is an overview of some of these movements.

III. 1 Local Movements

Globalisation adversely affects local people in different ways. It may deprive them of their source of livelihood, displace them from the local market etc. **The Adivasi-Dalit led Plachimada Movement to conserve and protect the sources of drinking water at Palghat in Kerala** may be cited as a good example of local resistance. Another illustration is the bold and heroic decision taken by the Koorachund farmers in Kozhikode to get relieved from the market penetration of Transnational Companies like Pepsi Cola and Coca Cola.

III. 2 National Movements11

The struggles led by the various trade unions, farmers’ organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could initiate some national level resistance to globalisation in India. Similar attempts were there in other parts of the world. The recent resistance to **Special Economic Zones (SEZs**) in the farmlands in India by organised Farmers Movements may be cited as a case of National Level Anti-Globalisation Struggle.

III. 3 Global Movements  
In order to counter globalisation effectively global level resistance movements are necessary. Already a number of such movements have been organised. One such effort is the World Social Forum.

The demonstrations that the world witnessed in such venues like the WTO’s Ministerial Meeting at Seattle and Cancun; G-8 meetings at Genoa and the IMF/World Bank Meetings at Davos—all reveal the global level resistance to globalisation.

IV. Alternative : A Search

THE defenders of globalisation hold the view that there is no theoretical and practical alternative to globalisation. This is called the TINA syndrome. But now the world has come to a position that there are many alternatives (TAMA). The following is a theoretical as well as practical search for alternatives to capitalist globalisation.

IV. I Theoretical

We may take Karl Polanyi’s12 concept of ‘embeddedness’ to start a theoretical construction of alternatives to globalisation. Polanyi distinguishes three phases of society-economy inter-relationship. In the first phase, particularly under prehistoric capitalism, the economy was embedded in the society. So social rules and practices governed economic activities. In this phase, religion and ethics exerted tremendous influence over the economy.

But when capitalism emerged in the 18th century, the economy became disembedded from the society. The so called ‘invisible hand’ or ‘market mechanism’ enabled this disembedded-ness. Economic decisions were taken by market laws, mainly the law of demand and the law of supply. Capitalist minded political economists of classical and neo-classical schools claimed that a free market economy could spontaneously resolve the ‘basic economic problem’ most efficiently. The so-called ‘pareto criterion’ was developed to evaluate and certify the well functioning of a market economy.

The efficacy of the market/capitalist economy was questioned by such economists like Karl Marx, J.M. Keynes and many others. Marx theorised that a state driven by the proletariat would be the best agency for efficient economic administration. Later Lenin introduced economic planning as an alternative mechanism for the efficient allocation of resources and just distribution of the total produce.

In the background of the great depression, J.M. Keynes theorised the involvement of the state in the economy with ‘fiscal engineering’ to steer the economy through the steady growth path.

When the Third World was formed in the post-Second World War era, the government was assigned the social and economic agency role to maximise ‘social welfare’ and development planning was

prescribed as the means to achieve it.

But in the latter part of the 20th century there were ‘state failures’ in all parts of the world which provided the intellectual space for liberal economists like Frederich won Hayek and Milton Friedman to assert liberal theories for competitive market oriented policies. This resulted in ‘neo-liberalism’ and ‘globalisation’.

Under neo-liberalism and globalisation the economy is extending its tentacles to the society to get it embedded into the economy. This sort of a situation has resulted in multi-dimensional social ills which we discussed earlier.

In this context the solution is to replace the competitive market as an allocator and distributor with alternative institutions. Coercieve planning as practised in the Soviet Union and other socialist counties also proved a failure. In this situation we need an alternative ideology which could legitimise ‘re-embedding the economy in society rather than having society driven by the economy’.13 ‘Cooperation’ and ‘community’ may be considered as the main pillars of alternatives to globalisation.

IV. 2 Practical Alternatives

There are a number of practical alternatives to counter the onslaught of ‘globalisation’. The following is a brief discussion of it.

IV. 2.1 Promotion of Self-Reliance: ‘The economy’ may be viewed at various levels, from the ‘family’ to the ‘village’ to the ‘state’ to the ‘nation’ etc. At each level, there has to be relative self-reliance. For example, the family has to employ its productive resources in such a way as to provide goods to meets its ‘needs’. The cooperative efforts of members and participatory decision-making are very significant. The woman should be given an equal status to the male members in the family. Similarly, at the village level whatever is required by the people should be produced as far possible within its geographic terrain. On the state and national levels it would be preferable to phase out the dependence on foreign aid and borrowing. Foreign debt is a trap to facilitate imperialist globalisation.

IV. 2.2 Avoid ‘Bads’ and ‘Consumerism’: The TNCs are the main beneficiaries of globalisation. Through various ways they domesticate the potential consumers in order to maintain their market. Most of the products of TNCs may not be necessary for ordinary people but due to ‘consumerism’ they are forced to buy all these. Consumerism has been leading people to indebtedness and even to suicide.

IV. 2.3 IT to re-build ‘community’: Globalisation fragmentises ‘community’. But the information media evolved through globalisation could be effectively used to re-build the community.

IV. 2.4 Decentralised Planning: If properly steered decentralised politics and planning can be a potential weapon to fight globalisation. Grassroots social and economic institutions like the Self-Help Groups. Kudumbasrees, Micro-financing etc. can empower people enabling them to avert globalisation.

V. Conclusion

IN this paper we have portrayed the dangers of globaliasation particularly in the Third World countries like India. We also cited the protest movements at different levels in various parts of the world. Finally, we also observed that there are many alternatives to globalisation both theoretically and practically.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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