

# GLOBALIZATION: A WORLD WITHOUT ALTERNATIVES

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**W**e live in times marked by a profound disorientation, and a perplexed reorientation towards the world and its, our future. Many a fighting faith of yesteryear seems to us deeply incoherent or problematic. Many a leading thinker renegotiates her cognitive counters: whether they be the end of ideology, the end of history, the end of politics. The more valiant amongst us have moved suddenly and swiftly from a worship of a plural, heterogeneous world to an obscene sycophancy of a unipolar world and encouraging the process whereby the dreams of a solitary superpower threaten to become the nightmare for the world of nations, especially the South. How else do we understand the possibility of near universalization of MacCarthyism even in the land of Lenin? How is it that our languages, and with these those, our visions of the world, seem to have been so irrecoverably transformed?

Perhaps, this change, all of it, may be located in the notion of "globalization" comprising all those processes "by which the people of the world are incorporated in a single world society" (Albrow & King, 1990-8). In this sense, the processes of globalisation are not new. But one may distinguish at least three historic phases or stages of "globalization." The first long phase of "globalization" accomplished colonial imperialism, over long stretches of time and space throughout the world. The contemporary, second one, is marked by an international efflorescence of concern for human rights and standards of international justice which will chasten the arrogance of sovereign power everywhere. The third stage of "globalisation", running concurrent with the second, has been marked by a steady rise of forces of late capitalism, so actively foreseen by Karl Marx in *Grundrisse*, manifesting multinational hegemony and the dominance of international financial institutions both emerging as suprastatal centres of authority.

The second phase of "globalisation" was indeed dramatically different from the colonial/imperial phase. In the heady days of decolonisation and self-determination of most peoples of the Third World and the emergence of the United Nations system as a prime weapon of the weak, "globalisation" signifies a new vision of the human

future. This vision was concretised steadily in the sixties and seventies by epochal enunciations of human rights. Thus, "globalisation" in the second phase signified the articulation of a new culture and ethics of power, both nationally and internationally. Or should we call this second phase 'globalism'?

Since the inaugural Universal Declaration of Human Rights, developments in recognition of individual human beings against and over state power are, indeed, remarkable. Not merely do they protect and promote basic human rights, categorised as civic, political, economic and cultural rights of individual human beings but we see a steady expansion of conferment of basic human rights so specific human collectives or groups such as women, indigenous peoples, racially discriminated, physically disabled, mentally ill and dispossessed peoples, migrants and most recently, children. Equally remarkable are articulations of rights to self-determination, economic and cultural rights of individual human beings, right against apartheid, right to environment, immunity from genocide, right to peace and the most recent declaration of the right to development of people and states. These enunciations truly mark the advent of a new culture of collective democratic rights of people.

The new culture of globalism also saw that human rights were not directed only against state power; increasingly, they were addressed to formations in civil society, wielding power over people. The little known UN Declaration of 1975 concerning **Scientific and Technological Progress in the Interest of Peace and for the Benefit of Mankind** urges states to so deploy science and technology or to avoid "flagrant violations of the Charter of the United Nations" and eliminate "inadmissible distortion of the purposes that should guide technological developments for the benefit of mankind." Similar in spirit are the Tokyo Declaration of 1971 addressed to the medical profession in dealing with situations of torture, cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment, and the 1982 General Assembly Proclamation of the Code of Medical Ethics, the UN Committee on Crime Prevention, Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, Lawyers and Judges, the 1986 Ottawa Declaration of Health for All, and the movement for a new international information order. All these measures address and involve autonomous professional groups as bearers of basic duties to the peoples of each nation and of the world.

As if this was not enough, the culture of globalism addressed itself to the task of enunciating visions of

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social progress, imbued with standards of international justice in relations and among states. For example, the 1969 UN Declaration of Social Progress and Development in addition to enshrining and enriching the principles of *Panchashila* (known in international law literature as the Nehru Doctrine) proclaimed the duty for developed countries to provide for "greater assistance on better terms," requiring specific dedication of one per cent of the GNP as minimal "aid volume target" as well as "the general easing of terms of lending to the developing countries through low-interest on loans and long grace periods for the repayment of loans" and the assurance that the allocation of such loans will be based on "strictly socio-economic criteria, free of any political considerations."

We understood, till recently, by globalisation, a realisation of the culture of "globalism." In the spirit of globalism in the mid-eighties globalisation appeared as a description of those values which take the real world of five billion people as an object of concern, the whole earth as the physical environment, everyone living as citizens of the world, consumers and producers, and with a common interest in collective action to solve global problems (Albrow & King, 1990:8). "Globalism" seems to be thus a very concrete universalism, moved by the actual sight of starving children in Ethiopia or by the data on malnutrition in Bangladesh (*Ibid*).

But "globalism" in this sense has suffered a massive setback ever since the incoherence of the American economy, with billions of dollars deficit, has come to full view. The humane languages of globalism stand eroded by languages of Super-301, structural adjustment programs (cruelly emerging in an acronym as SAP), trade retaliation, debt problem; gone are the languages of the New International Economic Order, Sustainable Development, Right to Development so prominent in collective United Nations enunciations.

The passage from "globalism" is marked by discursive practices where collective interdependence becomes collective dependence of South on North; where consumption needs of industrialised societies begin to enjoy ontological priority over the minimum basic needs of the wretched of the earth in the Third World; where resilient-market friendly liberal ideologies provide the dominant visions of human futures on the eve of the twenty-first century.

If practices of power account for this shift from 'globalism' to 'globalisation,' practices of knowledge too have been

complicitous. The variety of shifts in discursive formations or traditions of thought have also, I believe, created the ground for the shift. Even at the risk of a reductive narrative, it is important to highlight how the power of modern thought has profoundly transformed the very thought of power. And all this has also transformed the idea of the resistance of power.

Thus, at the very time of efflorescence of standards of international justice, promulgated by the United Nations system, philosophical critique of rights and justice has reached its highest potential. Rights remain a moral good among many other moral goods, defying the logic of hierarchic prioritization. The explosion of rights enunciation in the last half of the twentieth century is paradoxically accompanied by a philosophic universalization of young Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, at a time curiously when the very idea of 'revolution' has lost its historic title to legitimacy. The down of an Age of Rights is also marked by the twilight of philosophic

thought which made it possible in the first place. Among the more eminent moral philosophers today exists a rights-weariness.

This word-weariness, with rights discourse would not have been practically problematic had not the varieties of post-modernisms/post-structuralisms tried to shake the very foundations by interrogating the notion of being "human." Any discourse

on 'human rights' must, ineluctably, adhere to a foundationist notion of 'human' beings who are entitled to rights. But if that very notion is periclitated by philosophic contingencies, the notion of 'right,' too, becomes anguishingly problematic. In the earlier philosophic lineage what was at stake was: who will count as a human being or the criteria of individuation as regards sentient bearers of rights howsoever problematic, and actually horrid (witness the exclusion from the realm of rights of slaves, aliens, women, "barbarians," "heathens," colonized peoples), the moral baseline privileged whoever was to count as 'human' as a bearer of certain rights and freedoms. The subsequent rights revolution was made possible by a rich expansion of criteria of individuation (B.Parekh, 1990). And this expansion thus made possible by adherence to the idea of being and remaining human.

But this very idea now trembles before philosophical critiques deprivileging the notion of being human. M.Foucault's *The Death of Man* sounded the deathknell in the sixties and the lamenting voices in the dirge include as diverse a range from Louis Althusser to Derek

Rights can no longer be conceded the status of self-evident, inalienable truths, and the labour of justifying rights only yields to staid semi-utilitarian rationales, which forbid any level of cogency higher than that of narrative pragmatism.



Parfitt. The problematization of 'subject' and 'agency' survived even the valiant polemics of E.P. Thompson and may outlive the monumental labours of subaltern historians.

'Globalism', in all its languages, was tinged by the notion of an ethical state: politics was constructed as an instrumentality of pursuit of a good society. The state was presupposed, *a la* Hegel to be an ethical entity or *a la* Gramsci as a custodian of values, a moral pedagogue despite the acknowledged contingencies of the Nietzschean will to power. The empirical diversity of versions and visions of good society apart, the new orthodoxy, in a variety of ways, interrogates profoundly the ethicality of the state. Much of the contemporary western theory is marked by the return of the repressed; the Nietzschean turn in political theory, more clearly perhaps than Marxism, addressed the problem of nihilistic practices of power, informed only by transvaluation of values in the march of will to power. Much like Matthew Arnold's *Empodocles on Etna* the world of power represents an arena "where ignorant armies clash by night." In such a vision of power, rights became contingencies of power, and not a discourse on its ethic. And state power, measured by the yardstick of human rights, begins to appear as an institutionalized order of insurgency.

It is in this milieu that Michel Foucault speaks towards the end of his bewildering corpus, of the very end of politics. If politics is the Other of Revolution, and if condition of possibility of revolution have ended, politics too must meet its end. All, legitimation of power, from now on, as Jean Francis Lyotard reminds us, should be performative, knowing no push and prod from the realm of supposed values as Max Weber mistakenly believed. And the logic of performativity ordains the end of what he calls metanarratives. He counsels to us all: "Destroy narrative monopolies;" "Take away the privileges the narrator has granted himself," Globalism's metanarrative of rights - its endless chain novel about human rights - trying to "face the truth and save the world" must be

replaced by little stories of rights and violations and resistance. Decontextualizing Lyotard thus, his counsel would be justice lies in an act of will to destroy metanarratives of power, rights and resistance. All that remains as our estate from now on is what he calls "justice of multiplicities." The hermeneutics of human rights will thus be antifoundational. As Stanley Fish is apt to remind us, antifoundationalism does not signify absence of any foundations. All it signifies is that the foundations have to be rhetorically negotiated. Theories about rights are negotiable genre of discursive totalities of power. How they are negotiated does not depend on 'theory' which has, in a real sense, no consequences. This is how pluralism and diversity avenge themselves.

The hardest task today is how to stop the state thinking through us in the direction of globalization, away from globalism. The rehabilitation of the culture of globalism, the reclamation of the lost languages of social justice, and dependent upon it the construction of practices of solidarity - as a fellowship of suffering - is the very agenda of human rights today.

This synoptic detour to the heart of post-modernist darkness, despite its rich radioactivity, was not designed to proclaim the end of rights thesis! Nor was it an exercise in the discourse of sociology of knowledge, which calls for a rigorous analysis. My effort was undoubtedly, to suggest the arena of cohabitation of knowledge with power and the somewhat uncanny ability of power to conscript unselfconscious epistemic recruits. In this direction, our prime task would be to recover from the debris of enlightenment,

thought-elements in post-modernisms which energize, rather than enervate, a vision of human emancipation.

It is this vision which globalisation threatens. The space for plurality shrinks a point where the whole world becomes an endless chain of shopping arcades or department stores, where all of us become potential Gremlins, lustfully mutated micro-organisms, in pursuit of instant, technologically mediated pleasures, stranger to the very idea of joy. The vision of globalisation threatens to take away local spaces. "Think globally, act locally" is a maxim confiscated of its meaning in an era when the "local" becomes the ghetto of the 'global.' A new world imperialism is in the making of globalisation. If we are to combat it, the historically available repertoire of strategies is furnished by globalism, which repudiates the maxim: "The North Knows the Best."