

Democracy under conditions of Globalization

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Globalization has challenged the established notions of liberal state and democracy. The autonomy of the liberal state is being increasingly compromised in favor of market forces and the governments of the nation-states are being subjected to new institutions of global governance. These developments have far-reaching implications for the future of democracy, particularly in the Third World.

The proponents of globalization argue that liberal democracy is the only suitable form of governance both for managing the modern state and for mediating the forces of rapid economic and cultural change occurring in all societies of the world today. In this process of political and economic globalization, the Third World societies continue to remain at the receiving end as they were during the Cold War. In fact, their maneuverability is being further reduced in the changed context. Options for the receiving societies are no longer thought of in terms of *delinking* or *opting out* from this process. The best they can do is to adapt to it. More specifically, the issue today is how quickly and uniformly should the countries of the world be made to adopt the institutional structures of liberal democracy, which in their specificities have historically evolved in a small cultural zone of the globe.

Thus, under globalization, adopting and working the institutions of modern representative democracy has suddenly become politically a deeply unsettling experience for the receiving societies of today. These societies, for different historical reasons—especially of colonization and westernization—were already experiencing difficulties in adapting the modern political institutions to their own history and political-cultural traditions. Now, they are pushed, often even coerced, to adopt a given form of (liberal) democracy and to make as clean a break as possible with their own political and

cultural pasts. Thus, ironically, at the end of the Cold War when democracy appeared to have acquired a new potential for its wider acceptance in different parts of the world, it was culturally parochialized and politically hegemonized by the new triumphalist doctrine of Globalization.

The result is: a particular form of liberal democracy has been made a mandatory part of the larger package of globalization. It is aimed at achieving higher levels of integration of the world economy and market, rather than deepening processes of democracy. This has brought about an abrupt shift in the discourse on democracy. The idea that democratization is a locally adaptive horizontal process, influencing the forms of governance, decision-making structures, and the consciousness of people within a particular society by making them widely participative and directly accountable to all those whose consent and participation they claim is being replaced by a one-size-fit-all kind of a top-down package. Even worse, the idea that every society may devise institutional forms of democracy taking into account its own political history and cultural ethos and, in the process, may choose its own pace of change is considered retrogressive for global-democracy.

For its success, the project of global economic and political homogenization, depends not on creating democratically representative institutions of global decision making and accountability. It, on the contrary, relies on building mechanisms of coercive hegemonic power of the world capitalist system. It is not accidental that global power is now ensconced in the veto-based Security Council of the United Nations, with all other agencies and offices of the United Nations vastly diminished in power and stature.

It will, however, be a mistake to identify the center of

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global power today with one nation-state enjoying military supremacy in the world, that is, the United States of America or with some specific countries of the West or the North. The hegemonic power for realizing global homogenization is exercised through a variety of transnational institutions: ranging from military organization like NATO to financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the W. T. O and the multinational corporations. And the political-cultural base of this new global power system lies in the various metropolitan centres of the North as well as of the South.

This project of global homogenization has brought about a sharp divide—linguistic, cultural, and economic—between the metropolitan and the vernacular, the macro institutions of governance and the people and communities they seek to govern—both at the global level and within the national societies all over the world. All forms of governance other than market-wedded liberal democracy, particularly the local-communitarian ones, are deemed suspect by the metropolitan elite—bankers, businessmen, technocrats, managers. They are perceived as asymmetric and structurally incongruent vis-a-vis the macro institutions governing global economy and market.

In this process of establishing hegemonic economic and political-power structure every non-liberal and 'non-democratic' nation-state is expected to make the transition to a market-friendly liberal-democratic state. The global power system however would support a technocratic-authoritarian regime that is prepared to 'integrate' its economy with the new world economic system. But it can not tolerate an unobliging liberal democratic state insisting on defending its sovereignty in articulation of its own policies aimed at achieving internal political cohesion, economic distribution, and social justice.

The global agencies thus look upon liberal democracy in instrumental terms—as an instrument for sustaining and managing the world capitalist economy. In brief, liberal democracy is now made to function as market democracy so that the receiving countries create political-institutional guarantees for mobile international capital and ensure pliability of their governments to demands of the world economic system.

The new, post-Cold War global power structure comprises on the one hand of a few economically rich and militarily powerful democracies such as the G-7 countries and of transnational organizations like NATO, WTO and multinational corporations, on the other. Both these wings of global power, work in tandem to sustain the larger world-capitalist system. The power is exercised

through mounting, whenever and wherever necessary, military interventions—ostensibly under U. N. auspices—and through maintaining its monopoly on weapon transfers, technological know-how and on world markets.

By maintaining oligopolistic and unimpeded access to world resources, the world economic system ensures expansion of metropolitan life and metropolitan culture the world over—a political culture that privileges the consumer over the citizen. This is how the world capitalist system can establish its power base globally, that is, by subordinating the idea of citizenship to that of consumership, which, unlike citizenship, is not confined territorially and is at the same time available to global political and market manipulations. The primacy of consumer identity for individuals residing in the metropolitan centres of the world is considered more conducive to maintaining the hegemony of the world capitalist system globally and that of the metropolitan classes within the respective nation-states. It can only be expected that the political governance of different nation-states, when structured in the universal terms of liberal democracy as a market democracy, shall weaken, if not erase, the idea of national citizenship in favor of global consumership.

The post-Cold War project of globalization thus has changed the idea of liberal democracy into that of a neo-liberal market democracy. Consequently, democracy is no longer viewed as essentially a participatory process of decision making. Even more, the idea of popular sovereignty is seen as a roadblock to the expansion of market democracy. In effect, in its new incarnation as market democracy, liberal democracy has become a means of establishing political and cultural hegemony of a metropolitan elite in society. Such hegemony, can ensure, it is believed, cultural, political, and economic homogenization of the world. But such a project of homogenization, aimed at bringing about market democracies everywhere, has put the state, particularly in the multiethnic societies of the Third World, in a dilemma, namely, one of securing its liberal institutions from the forces of social and cultural destabilization caused by the state's own interventionist project of homogenization and, at the same time, creating a stable national-cultural basis for its rule over the society. The result is the revival of old politics of ethno-lingual and ethno-religious nationalisms in these societies.

Yet it is believed that the neo-liberal model of the market democracy is most suitable for the governance of the Third World societies. Afflicted as they are simultaneously by intense ethnic as well as class divisions these societies, it is believed, are not manageable globally

by any other model of governance. It is thought so probably for two reasons. First, this new version of liberal democracy, easily affords an instrumental view of the state—the state as the vehicle for reaching private ends. Second, the neo-liberal state, being ideologically and institutionally impervious to the recognition of cultural differences is considered an ideal form of governance. Such a state is expected to encourage not only social deracination of its populations, but to commit them to new forms of economic activities stretching across national boundaries.

In sum, *under globalization, democracy has ceased to be the primary condition of power for a liberal state. The liberal state now has to justify itself in terms of its new reason for existence, i. e. , liberalization and globalization.* This change in the character of the liberal state has produced a dissonance in its functioning, between its institutional norms of democracy and policy processes by which it seeks to implement its new programmes of economic liberalization and globalization. Thus, when criteria of democratic governance conflict with the new economic policies of the State, the latter acquire primacy over the former. The democratic aspirations of people, when expressed through opposition to policies of globalization and through self-rule politics of local communities, are seen by the state and the new metropolitan elite as anti-national and undemocratic. Even the idea of security transcends the people and the communities and gets situated in the institutions of the state that have to be secured externally from other states and internally from its own people.

Thus what was theorized as the liberal democratic state has, in reality, become a liberal economic and national-security state—i. e. , a neo-liberal state. The democratic aspect of such a state has been condensed at the stratospheric heights of its macro institutions. All other organizations and sociocultural and territorial entities in the society are placed beneath the state which in turn uses its coercive power in the aid of the national metropolitan economy which is now linked to the global power structure. As a result, democracy as a local/national organizational culture and political practice is losing its relevance for the new market theory of the liberal state.

In practice, this process of creating a vertically integrated political structure nationally for the state and its integration with the world economy globally does not seem to succeed in realizing its goal of creating a nationally deracinated population and a global consumer society. Instead, it tends to facilitate establishment of

hegemonic power of an ethnic or ethno-religious majorities over politics and culture. In this process, the majority principle of representation is being overtaken by majoritarian ethnic politics, and the market principle of competition turned into ethnic competition for the economic and cultural resources in the society, often resulting in the monopolistic hold of an ethnic majority over these resources. Furthermore, when representation becomes integral to the process of ethnic competition, the guardianship role of the democratic state—especially vis-a-vis minorities and weaker sections in the society—becomes seriously eroded. The ethnic majority's politics of hegemony then acquire a democratic sanction.

In a culturally heterogeneous society, a regime controlled or supported by an ethnic majority may indeed acquire a degree of political stability, and the state maintain its formal democratic character. But such stability of the regime and the democratic character of the state, acquired through the support (electoral or otherwise) of the ethnic majority, always remains tenuous. For, usually, the ethnic majority fails to reflect the identity and interests of all its constituents. In actual life, within itself, it is rarely homogeneous or an invariant political majority. In this politics of establishing ethnic hegemony the liberal state is deprived of the immunities it enjoyed vis-a-vis the incursions and assaults from a political ethnic majority on the democratic norms and procedures that protected its liberal character. The minorities, marginalized and alienated by ethno-majoritarian politics then turn to insurgency and terrorism. Working under conditions of globalization, liberal democracy thus becomes a battleground for ethnicities.

Conclusion

Thus the universal promise of the liberal state—national integration within societies and institutional integration and homogenization globally—seems to be going awry, both for the globalizers and for the metropolitan elites of the receiving countries who have been in a great hurry to integrate their societies with the global market. It is not surprising that the globalizers now anticipate as inevitable the global clash of civilizations. In the meanwhile, the liberal state in the receiving societies is being torn apart by religious fundamentalism, majoritarian ethnic chauvinism, political insurgencies and terrorism by ethno religious as well as marginalized communities.