



The Impact of Globalization on Environment and Human Rights

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Abstract

The more the economies of the world become integrated the larger the flow of goods, services and information across the states happen and lesser becomes the sovereign authority of the states to manage the economic, political and interstate affairs, a remarkable impact is cast upon the environmental and human rights all over the world. It is an undeniable fact that globalization has adversely impacted the global environment. At the same time it is also true that economic inequality across the globe is gradually rising. To enjoy a safe, secured and pollution free environment is one of the significant human rights which every human being is entitled to. But more the environment becomes degraded, larger becomes the threat to the right to life. At the same time it is an undeniable fact that Globalisation has given rise to some of the most devastating and unnecessary conflicts throughout the world which are responsible for serious human rights violations. This paper is an humble attempt to analyze the interrelationship between environmental and human rights and to assess, to what extent globalization has denied environmental and human rights to the people of the world.

Key Words : Integrated, Sovereign, authority, human rights, environment.

Content

It was the end of the Cold War with the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1990 when Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History And The Last Man" appeared to come true. With the USA emerging as the sole super power and capitalism posing as the one and only economic ideology left in the world, the phenomenon of globalization crept in. Globalisation, or the worldwide expansion of capitalism began to invade large number of economies of the world. Those States, inclined towards the Soviet Style communism with the central features of planned economy, nationalized sectors – gradually opted for economic liberalization, and privation of the previously nationalized sectors, either willingly or unwillingly. When a significant number of third world countries, notably the poor states of Asia and Africa went to



the global lending institutions for financial assistance to get rid of their miserable economic condition presented to them by their erstwhile colonial masters, the lending institutions agreed to grant them loans but tagged with certain conditions. One of those conditions was to adopt the structural Adjustment Programme. By agreeing to adopt this programme these poor countries agreed to accept liberalization, privatization and globalization.

Apparently these measures were imposed upon the debt – seeking countries on the pretext of improving their economies. But actually by imposing these measures those hapless countries were compelled to put their feet into the trap of globalization and sing the triumph of world wide expansion of the one and only capitalism. When these Asian and African countries liberalized their economies, invited FDI and let entrepreneurs from the foreign states set up business ventures in their countries, they were falsely gifted the dreams of ever increasing prosperity and economic pomp and magnificence. But beneath these false promises, lay the curse of economic and environmental exploitation.

When foreign companies come to set up their branches in the third world countries, they declare to have brought with them advanced technology with which a relatively large amount of goods could be produced within a short span of time and at much lesser cost. But in reality that technology, having been turned obsolete in the developed countries was brought to the third world country and it contributed significantly to the pollution of the environment.

The fact remains undeniable that a safe, clean and healthy environment is essential for the enjoyment of human rights including the right to freedom of expression, education, participation and remedy.¹ Over the past ten years the relevance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the current debate over climate change, toxic waste and energy has been reaffirmed. Environmental damages endanger the right to life, to health, to water, to housing, to development and the rights of the indigenous people. Affected populations have the right to be protected against polluted water, air, soil and displacements resulting from desertification and floods.²



Enjoyment of life and its attainment including the right to life with human dignity includes in its ambit protection and preservation of environment, ecological balance free from pollution of air and water. Although the right to clean environment is nowhere mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but it makes some conditions with regard to rights and freedoms, such as Article 29 of the UDHR states:

- 1) Everyone has duties to the communities in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
- 2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirement of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.³

Capitalism as an ideology is based upon the principle of maximization of profit. Intense competition among the economic players for the maximization of profit has enhanced the significance of the energy sector across the length and breadth of the world. It is energy sector which contributes 73 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The more the emission of greenhouse gases, the larger is the degree of global warming, subsequently leading to climate change. Hydrocarbons, particularly coal and oil – are the pillars of modern industrial activity.⁴ The automotive and energy industries are inevitably linked with oil and steel. Coal alone supplies nearly 80 percent of many countries demand for energy. Coal and oil and their process of extraction have been an immensely significant factor in influencing global geopolitics.

Capitalism has always been an ideology that promotes competition among players, even among states for capturing as many markets as possible for the enhancement of profit. The First World War itself can be termed as a conflict encouraged by competition among states for capturing markets in the form of acquisition of colonies. It was found that when almost all states of Europe had become successful in acquiring colonies, Germany was still unable to get hold of any colony. It may not be wrong to assume that Germany's quest for the acquisition of colonies prepared the ground for the outbreak of the First World War.



It was from during the First World War that the role of hydrocarbons in geopolitics began to be realized. Out of the lust for acquiring control over the hydrocarbon resources of the Turkish Ottoman empire, the European Powers particularly Britain hatched a conspiracy to instigate an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire to divide the oil rich territories of the Persian Gulf between the Allied Powers.⁵

During the Second World War, driven by the greed to capture the oil resources of the Caucasus and Caspian basin, Germany attacked Russia in 1941 through the Operation Barbarossa. The Iraq – Iran war in the 1980s engulfed the whole region in conflict over a couple of acres of the oil – rich land in the Persian Gulf. This war was followed by the Gulf war when Iran attacked Kuwait in its quest for capturing the Kuwaiti oil fields. Now, what was the impact of these wars? It was nothing but the pollution of the environment, since the hostile forces leaked as much as 11 million barrels of crude oil, destroying the unique biodiversity of the region. The oil evaporated into thick black mud, causing massive environmental degradation. Uranium tipped missiles used during the Gulf war contaminated the Arabian Desert with lethal radio activity.⁶

Whenever any conflict for hydro carbons breaks out, the inevitable results are displacement in enormous degree, civil war resulting in mass starvation and immense loss of precious lives.

Globalisation, competition for larger industrial activity and the quest for maximization of profit enhance the requirement of hydrocarbons and the hydrocarbons remain responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, which lead to global warming.

The rise of sea levels due to melting of polar ice, the meltdown of glaciers all will result in inundation of huge swathes of lands leading to mass displacement. This is a direct threat to right to life. The rapid cut down of trees and clearing of forests for setting up industries leads to deforestation which is once again a direct threat to the rights of tribal population for whom forests and trees have been the ever precious possessions of life.

So far as the issue of human rights in the International Context is concerned, globalization, which is nothing more than the worldwide expansion of capitalism has started manifesting its internal contradictions which are contributing to the violation of human rights globally. The



present conflict – ridden situation in the Middle East is a creation of the Western Capitalist powers for capturing the oilfields for satisfying their lust for profit and economic prosperity. The undue interference of the Western Powers in the internal affairs of the Middle East contributed to the production of millions of refugees who are now denied shelter in Europe and the rest of the Western World. What is happening in today's Afghanistan is one more outcome of the Western Powers' thirst for gaining control over the hydro carbon resources of the Middle East and violating human rights of millions of Afghan nationals.

Today it is known to the entire world that the excuses advanced by USA for invading Afghanistan, namely destroying the bases of the terrorist organization AL Qaida and shooting down Osama Bin Laden were insignificant. America's invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq invasion in 2003 were direct attempts on the part of USA to shift the internal contradictions of American Capitalism outside. One of the most significant contradictions of capitalism is the gradual decrease in the rate of profit. This was explained by Marx with the help of a simple formula namely $P=S/C+V$. Here P stands for profit, C for Constant capital and V for variable capital. The value of variable capital increases with the passage of time and this raises the value of the addition of C and V. As a result the value of the denominator increases than the numerator. This automatically reduces the value of profit. To shift this contradiction outside the capitalist state becomes desperate to colonise other states, though in this age of globalization colonialism has acquired a new name with some new features and that is neocolonialism, the other name of economic exploitation. The urge of the western powers to invade in the middle east was actually a manifestation of their urge to shift their internal contradictions of capitalism outside. Now that their purpose is served, USA has pulled out its troops from devastated Afghanistan, caring the least for the hapless civilians who remain the victims of daily persecution by the Taliban. Not only that, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin even went to the extent of declaring that the USA military does not have the forces and firepower in Afghanistan to expand its current mission from securing the Kabul Airport to collecting Americans and at-risk Afghans elsewhere in the capital and escorting them for evacuation.⁷ It sounds really very bizarre since on the eve of invading Afghanistan USA had provided the excuse of defending the human rights of the common Afghans against the atrocities of the Taliban rulers. Now that, once again the Taliban rulers are back with their



same ruthless and disgraceful tactics, the US authority no more remembers its pledge of defending the rights of the common Afghans. Similar is the case with Iraq, Syria and the rest of the Middle East. To satisfy their lust for power and global influence the Western powers particularly USA and Russia have been interfering in the internal affairs of the Middle East, leading to the mass violation of human rights.

Conclusion

Globalisation is leading to rising inequality all over the world, reminding one of the early nineteenth century scenarios of Europe when one used to witness islands of affluence surrounded by oceans of poverty. The neoliberal states who propagate globalization as the one and only means for the achievement of economic prosperity and boast of their high economic growth, themselves face the question raised by their own country men and that question is – if economic growth is really outstanding why is the average standard of living not improving? When it comes to the overall condition of the basic human rights of the people in the western nations, the result is evident from their poor ranks in the World Happiness Index. In most of the wealthiest and the most powerful capitalist states, there has been no real improvement in the standard of living of the common masses.

So far as environment is concerned, globalization can never do anything to protect environment. So long as the urge for competition among states for more power, more economic prosperity and more profit continues to haunt them, they cannot pay attention to the issue of protection of global environment. Conference after conference on global climate change takes place, various pledges are adopted from time to time, but every time there is a reluctance on the part of the developed nations to fulfill their obligations relating to mitigating the effects of greenhouse gas emissions. On the contrary they shift their obligations to the poor and underdeveloped states, putting the entire blame of climate change on their shoulders.

Given such a scenario, protection of environment and human rights remain an altogether challenge in front of the global community in the context of the present world wide expansion of capitalism.



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