

## **STATE OF ANTIGLOBALISATION MOVEMENT: CHALLENGES AHEAD**

At the current juncture, three important inter-related processes (amongst many others) determining the dynamics of antiglobalisation movement<sup>i</sup> are: 'Recognition, Accommodation, Challenges'. As we would see in the relevant sections, these three processes and their inter-relations shed light on the changing political understanding within antiglobalisation movement on different issues, institutions and processes. Furthermore, the analysis of these processes also helps us evaluate the movement of the antiglobalisation movement on the maturity curve and provides us with critical inputs to identify challenges. Such characteristics associated with these processes as well as their analysis has prompted the author to take a closer look at them.

### **The Process of 'Recognition'**

The process of 'recognition' has two important dimensions that are relevant to antiglobalisation movement. The 'internal' dimension of this process is the one that can be linked to the growing realization within the antiglobalisation movement towards 'recognizing' the political gains associated with respect to:

1. Understanding and relating to issues, institutions and processes on various planes (e.g. groups are increasingly realizing that it is important to challenge the value framework governing 'neoliberalism' while challenging institutions like the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) proliferating the same);
2. Articulating clear positions with respect to how 'antiglobalisation' movement (global movement for justice and peace) is opposed to terrorism of any form as well as to 'militarized globalisation', especially in the wake of post-September 11 crises.
3. Carrying out 'alternative' research that not only questions the value framework governing politics of implementation but also the politics of existence with respect to institutions and processes;
4. Forming coalitions at various levels;
5. 'Accommodating' concerns of different interest groupings during coalition building;
6. Initiating processes with the aim of creating an awareness vis-à-vis heterogeneity associated with elements that could feed into formulation of 'alternatives' to the existing neoliberal framework;
7. Joining hands with mass movements and other movements for building perspectives on alternatives to neoliberal framework and for deepening outreach;

### **The external dimension**

The 'external' dimension of the process of 'recognition' is linked to the way in which antiglobalisation movement is perceived by different sections of societies, media and most importantly by different movements viz. mass movements, students movement, trade union movement, the human rights movement, the women's' rights movement etc.

The way antiglobalisation movements are perceived by sections of societies differs across developing and developed countries. For example, In India the middle and the higher middle classes are not very much vocal against globalisation. This is because the processes resulting from globalisation are not impacting their disposable incomes, employment opportunities, prices of essentials, at an alarmingly high rate. But in USA, the middle class is becoming more and more vocal against globalisation. This is because of the growing number of pink slips that are getting handed over to employees as a result of mergers or under the garb of making firms globally competitive. What is also interesting to note <sup>ii</sup> (at least in the Indian context) is that families from middle and higher middle classes who have been negatively impacted by neoliberal globalisation, are not seen critiquing the phenomenon on the premises of the value framework governing the same.

The mainstream media, which used to aggressively and generously equate ‘anti-globalisers’ to ‘anarchists’, has off late started becoming little more balanced towards issues that are being raised by movements. Furthermore, the established press no longer treats organisations and individuals seeking a reversal of globalization as “cranks”. This changing perception of the media could be considered as a reaction to the US stance after September 11<sup>th</sup>, especially in the context of the Doha Ministerial of the WTO, <sup>iii</sup> the collapse of Argentina’ economy coupled with the Enron debacle and other events that have exposed the crisis of legitimacy of institutions like the WB, IMF, WTO and the US Treasury.

The participatory nature of demonstrations at the Seattle Ministerial Conference of the WTO (1999) and at subsequent events of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank and the G-8 have shown that other movements do recognize the strategic importance of being a part of ‘antiglobalisation movement’. Which then naturally brings us to the discussion on analyzing the process of ‘Accommodation’.

### **The Process of ‘Accommodation’**

The fact that a number of movements, civil society organizations, NGOs, academic institutions and others all over the world agreed to endorse a common statement titled ‘Our World Is Not For Sale’ (OWINFS) <sup>iv</sup> against the current form of neoliberal globalisation being pushed by institutions like the IMF, WB and the WTO, clearly shows that the process of ‘accommodation’ if not ‘integration’ has begun.

Another striking example of this growing level of accommodation, *at least amongst the ‘left’ within the antiglobalisation movement* is reflected from the nature of participation that World Social Forum (WSF) is witnessing since the last two years of its creation. As Melanie Gillbank notes in her article, “Other worlds are possible, 60,000 can’t be wrong”<sup>v</sup> the WSF’s for the last two years have attracted a “wide spectrum of political views within the left: from the reform agenda, to abolitionists and even between”.

In spite of these growing successes, it would be too premature to say that the process of accommodation has come of age. But, it would not be wrong to say that formations like the OWINFS, or organization of events like the WSF would go a long way with respect to infusing confidence among organizations, mass movements and other movements

(opposed to the model of neoliberalism) to discuss their differences over specific issues, more constructively.

Importantly, the need of increasing the pace of these constructive discussions is going to be all the more important for two reasons:

1. With the endorsement of the Doha Declaration of the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO, 'linkage between trade and environment', which remained on the sidelines since the existence of the WTO is now going to be discussed as a mainstream issue. This mainstreaming of environment could be used by factions of civil society (especially the right wing trade liberalizers) as well as by certain governments to re-kindle the debate on 'environment protection' v/s 'environment protectionism'.
2. Also one finds that, the issue of linking the process of trade liberalisation under the ambit of the WTO to labour standards continues to reappear if not in the mainstream but at least on the sidelines of discussions taking place during Ministerials of the WTO. It would be therefore very important for organisations and movements having a range of opinions on these issues to start understanding each others concerns in a more constructive manner before any harmful language gets inserted into the official WTO text on these issues. Some efforts are already being made in this direction, for example, during 2001, Focus on the Global South and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung had organised a roundtable<sup>vi</sup> involving the participation of trade unions having differential positions on linking the process of trade liberalisation at the WTO to labour standards. This roundtable was convened to create a better understanding amongst organisations on developmental implications of demanding a 'formal' linkage between the process of trade liberalisation and labour standards on an iniquitous platform like the WTO.
3. The World Social Forum-2002, organized under the banner of "Another World Is Possible" has already initiated discussions on the elements that could feed into the alternative models replacing the current neoliberal dominant model. It is critical that some basic level of understanding is generated amongst groups on issues and processes that could be important with respect to defining the value frameworks governing alternative systems.

Which then brings us squarely to addressing challenges within 'antiglobalisation movement'.

### **The Process of 'Challenge'**

One of the most challenging questions for the movement to answer is whether the 'antiglobalisation movement' is against the concept of globalisation or against the current form of globalisation being pushed under the neoliberal framework.

Many of us argue not against trade but against indiscriminate liberalization that destroys the capacity of national economies. Many want managed trade that would allow countries maximum flexibility in dealing with international market--to adopt strategies that would allow them to integrate into the international economy in ways that strengthen the capacity of their economies rather than destroys them. Thus,

whether to protect or to liberalize is not a doctrinal matter but one that is taken with the end of the national economic interest in mind. Controls on trade and capital flows are to be subordinated to national development and social objectives and overriding values.

It is indeed encouraging to note that such different positions are being discussed at events like the WSF. Understanding these nuances associated with discussions on globalisation is going to be significant, more so, when some in the 'antiglobalisation movement' have already initiated processes delving into the construction of alternatives.

Also challenging for the 'antiglobalisation movement' is to see how discussions taking place amongst active members on opposing proliferation of neoliberal agenda at the international level get linked to national and local debates. This is important not only for creating a better understanding within the international movement on local issues but also to generate mass support for the movement and its actions in different regions of the world. In fact, a problem that is generally found to be haunting discussions between NGOs, civil society groups and mass movements is that each of the three are discussing the same problem without providing adequate inputs for strategies of the remaining two.<sup>vii</sup>

Another intriguing set of questions that are being raised by a number of grassroots movements is, "How long should we keep on mobilising?" and "How long should we keep on struggling?" There is a growing feeling at the grassroots, (at least this is the author's experience in the Indian context) that mobilizations at the national and the international level are not having a desired impact on stopping the "bicycle" of neoliberalism and more importantly on preventing its disastrous impacts on their livelihood opportunities. But this should not be taken to mean that they are losing interest in the struggles. In fact what they are losing interest is in the 'democratic' and 'peaceful' means of finding solutions to their problems.

Which then raises some serious issues with respect to the kind of interventions, actors involved in antiglobalisation struggles would be expected to make at national and local levels. Should they only put roadblocks in the path of the neoliberal engine, which in fact is getting its fuel from local polity and bureaucracy? Or should antiglobalisation activists be a part of the process in a way that they influence the terms of reference defining the movement and pace of the neoliberal engine?

### **In conclusion...**

It is always difficult to conclude with respect to movements, happenings and situations in a state of flux. What one can opine about is the level of maturity of this flux and its rate of change that leads to creation of energy <sup>viii</sup>. The antiglobalisation movement and the processes that are significant in defining its dynamics are indeed in a state of flux. But what one can conclude from the discussions above is that this flux is indeed maturing and its momentum is spreading positive energies of hope, justice and equity at local, national and international level.

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<sup>i</sup> Although the use of the term 'antiglobalisation movement' is used to describe movements of this nature, taking place at the local, national and international level, it does not aim towards homogenizing the heterogeneity associated with these movements at various levels.

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<sup>ii</sup> This noting is based on the interactions with a number of Indian families falling in this income bracket

<sup>iii</sup> The US policy of citing anybody not with them in their so called 'war against terror' as a terrorist and then equating forces against globalisation to those spreading terror forced poor and some developing countries to dilute their positions at the Doha Ministerial of the WTO.

<sup>iv</sup> This statement was issued a few months before the Doha Ministerial Conference of the WTO and was signed by more than 700 organizations and movements all over the world. For more information on the same please visit <[www.ourworldisnotforsale.org](http://www.ourworldisnotforsale.org)>

<sup>v</sup> This article is currently hosted on the home page of the official website of Focus on the Global South <[www.focusweb.org](http://www.focusweb.org)>. Besides this article, there are many other articles on the World Social Forum 2002 and 2001 on this website.

<sup>vi</sup> For further details on the proceedings and papers presented at this roundtable please visit the official website of Focus on the Global South <[www.focusweb.org](http://www.focusweb.org)>

<sup>vii</sup> This particular problem was raised by a representative from MST (Brazilian Trade Union) during the post-Doha Ministerial Meeting of the 'Our World Is Not For Sale Coalition' at Brussels.

<sup>viii</sup> That the rate of change of flux determines the level of energy is a very basic concept in electro-magnetism, a subject commonly studied under the science of Physics