Promise of
Indian Pluralism and Solidarity

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Prologue

Keynote Address

Indian Polity and Concern for the Marginalized

Medha Patkar

It's indeed a privilege to be part of this National Colloquium. I consider it a forum to table issues affecting our country and the marginalized people. Today I wish to draw your attention to some of the issues in broader conceptual and ideological framework and suggest a few strategies where everyone can play a part.

* Medha Patkar (medha@narmada.org), an untiring social activist, has faced police brutality, starvation, even prison walls during the last 25 years at the forefront of Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement) against one of the world's largest river projects, the Sardar Sarovar Dam. She was also a Commissioner to the World Commission on Dams (1998-2000). She has received many awards among which the outstanding ones are Right Livelihood Award (the alternative Nobel Peace Prize) Sweden, 1992; Goldman Environment Prize, 1993; Green Ribbon Award for Best International Political Campaigner by BBC, England, 1998; M. A. Thomas National Human Rights Award from Vigil India Movement, 1999; the Deena Nath Mangeshkar Award, 1999; Mahatma Phule Award, 1999; and the Human Rights Defender's Award from Amnesty International, Germany, 1999.
Chapter Six

Healing Globalization for a Global Community

Jacob Kavunkal SVD

"It is the misery of our poor that is caused, not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin," wrote Charles Darwin long before the arrival of present day globalization (Ommen 2004:89). We are to see the problems of nature and human community in their relationship with the 'gods' of our times, capitalism, technology, and market, intimately related to globalization.

Globalization has been a topic of discussion in many a forum and articles and books and for the last twenty years or so, addressing every aspect of this complex phenomenon. Nevertheless, I am inclined to think that sufficient attention has not been paid to the possibilities of putting globalization, a sign of our times, at the service of humanity. Pope John XXIII, one of the greatest architects of modern Catholic ideology, while opening the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church, affirmed how "in the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which, by men's (sic) own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed to the fulfilment of God's

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superior and inscrutable designs” (John XXIII 1966:712). The unprecedented progress that science and technology have made during the last half century shows how the Pope proved himself accurate in reading the signs of his times. Robert Schreiter reminds us: “We are experiencing the making of a new world order, a new configuration of the relationships that shape the political, economic, and social order of the world” (Schreiter 2001:122). It is this world order that is still shaping itself, that we name as Globalization.

What it is
Though we can perceive certain discernible contours of this new world order, it is far from stabilized as it is a developing phenomenon still. Schreiter emphasizes two major divergent aspects: connectedness and exclusion. While communication and technological advancement hasten the former, greater concentration of wealth and economic resources foster the latter (Schreiter 2001:122). To a great degree globalization today is nearly identified with economic globalization and rightly so, in so far as modern globalization is very much associated with the globalized market. During the past several decades, the economies of the world have become increasingly linked through expanded international trade in services as well as in primary and manufactured goods, and through portfolio investments such as international loans and through direct foreign investments, especially by large multinational corporations. Simultaneously foreign aid has sharply declined in real terms. These developments have exercised a great impact, particularly on the developing world whose volume of imports and exports has experienced increase all the same. In the context of trade and international political economy the term globalization came into currency, to refer to “a process by which the economies of the world become increasingly integrated, leading to a global economy and, increasingly, global economic policy making, for example, through international agencies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO),” observe Todaro and Smith (Todaro and Smith 2009:589). In this economic meaning globalization implies the increased openness of economies to international trade, financial flows, and direct foreign investment. “The growing interconnection of all kinds across national governments and firms and directly between peoples is a process that affects everyone in the world, one that so far seems more visible in developed countries” (Todaro and Smith 2009:589). This explains why far globalization today is nearly always identified with economic globalization.

What affects the lives of the common folk as far as economic globalization is concerned is what is known as Neoliberal capitalism. Though there are different types of capitalism such as that of the US, or as it exists in Japan (government directed), or again the way it operates in most of the European Union countries (social democratic form), or the State-controlled capitalism of China, they all have the common label ‘neoliberal’ in so far as they try to do away with government control and regulation, seeking to subordinate their responsibilities to the demands of competition and profit (Schreiter 2001:128). The basic principle of business is risk and competition and security for business to flourish. This leads to the tension of competition and the drive to monopoly assuring ultimate certainty, eliminating competitors. Hence we can understand how globalization is the best way to have business certainty.

However, globalization is not a simple phenomenon, but is complex and dynamic. It has economic, political and social aspects affecting people in different degrees in each of these aspects. Sure, it has contributed to wide impoverishment, but it would be a mistake to confine globalization to economic reality alone, or to be blind to the many other aspects where it has caused certain homogeneity of humankind as humankind, without ignoring cultural differences within it.

While the modern phenomenon of globalization is intimately related to economic interests, it has to be admitted that economic interest has been with us all through the history of humankind. What we describe as globalization today is a distinctively new phenomenon, which has no doubt, roots in economic interests, but its roots are not only in economic interests. Most of the woes of globalization that we condemn are part of the economic interests and these in reality antedate globalization as such, though globalization, no doubt, has aggravated the problem. Poverty in India, for instance, cannot be explained without any recourse to the age-old caste system and the bottomless corruption prevailing in post-independence India. Hence, there is no justification to condemn globalization unconditionally, rather we must be open to discern within it “grace-filled possibilities” (Stackhouse 2007:5). Globalization, as Judith Morkle has pointed out, does not remain as a concept for analysis, but as something that has changed the way people look at the world. “Globalization today is understood as the increasingly interconnected character of the political, economic, and social life of the peoples on this planet. Better communications, the migration of peoples, often stimulated by war, ease of travel, new opportunities for study and business, and
international media coverage brought people face to face with new peoples and cultures” (Merkle 2004:182).

Globalization has an impact on every local context, practically on all peoples, social institutions and the ecology of the earth. It is best understood as a “worldwide set of social, political, cultural, technological and ethical dynamics, influenced and legitimated by certain theological, ethical and ideological motifs, that are creating a worldwide civil society that stands beyond the capacity of any nation-state to control” (Stockhouse 2007:8). It has elements demanding the rediscovery of universalistic principles of anthropology, morality and law, forming new institutions that require common recognition. In the process it is creating a newly contentious, comprehending public, one that modulates every regional and local context and yet is adapted into them and adopted by them in novel ways (Berger 2003:8). However, specialists of the different fields often tend to attribute the dynamics to the factors that most interest them. Even if their perceptions are true, they are partial, beyond which we are able to perceive a multiple and pluralistic dynamic “contributing to the formation of a religio-cultural and technological public infrastructure in the ethos, that while still fragile, could well lead to a new worldwide society of societies” (Stockhouse 2007:10). The formation of that sort of a communion in the broadest sense, without discrimination and marginalization must be the vision of the religious mission of our times.

An interpretation of globalization today requires a reinterpretation of history itself. Thus we cannot blindly bypass the role of Mohenjo-daro-Harappan civilizations and their possible impact on other ancient civilizations like the Chinese and the Mesopotamian civilizations. At any rate the spread of Buddhism in the Asian world is a clear indication of the globalizing tendencies of the ancient world. The Acts of the Divine Augustus, the political autobiography of the Roman emperor Augustus speaks of the peace that the Roman globalization brought about in 14 C.E., when the whole world “experienced the good faith of the Roman people,” Augustus wrote (Crossan and Reed 2004-407). Augustus' divinization and Rome's globalization were two sides of the one coin (Crossan and Reed 2004:407). That temptation continues to our own days, by other cities, if not by Rome, though what was happening then was not exactly the same as today's globalization, especially with regard to space and time. Yet, in the 21st century the world will not be dominated so much by any nation as much as by cities, judged by how much sway a city has over what happens beyond its own borders - its influence on and integration with global markets, culture, and innovation, according to a report by the Foreign Policy Magazine, in collaboration with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. The seats of traditional political power are not necessarily the most global.

It may be helpful to remember that the different sectors of human history such as medieval, modern, postmodern, and global are not watertight compartments, rather they permeate each other. Already in the 13th century Roger Bacon (1214-1292) caused and deepened the awareness of nature, laying the foundation for the exploitation of nature. Another Bacon (Francis Bacon: 1561-1626) urged humans to conquer nature for he said, “nature must not be a courtisan for pleasure” but “a spouse for generation, fruit and comfort” (Bacon 2004:28). Bacon believed that humans can by their efforts improve this world, by their control over a perfectible nature. This was followed by the scientific revelations introduced by Copernicus and Galileo (1564-1642).

Globalization cannot be equated with neo-colonialism, nor can it be seen as an imperial design of western nations, as some do. True, globalization has many effects of colonialism as people can lose control over their resources, or their way of life can be disrupted by cultural invasions. However, there are differences between the two. To begin with, colonialism was state controlled, a state exploiting another state, where as in globalization no state is directly involved as state, even if states may be struggling to be in the loop. According to many, the US is the centre of globalization though we cannot come across any identifiable centre in the US in control of globalization or capable of changing its direction. Globalization is not hierarchically organized as colonial power was and it is a polycentric affair as Schreiter has pointed out (Schreiter 2001:132-134). After the recent economic meltdown it is difficult to identify any specific nation or state as the centre of power, though some speak of the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India & China) as the ever-bourgeoing centres of power. Similarly, globalization cannot be described as a homogenization of culture. Despite the homogenizing tendencies of globalization it has to be admitted, as Robert Schreiter has emphasized elsewhere, “the local situations remain robust in their resistance” (Schreiter 1997:ix).

The authors of a significant work on Globalization, Global Transformation: Politics, Economics and Culture (Held et al. 1999), have underlined, there is an intensified and more regular transregional interconnectedness with greater velocity, widening the reach of networks
of social activity and power. Based on this the authors define globalization as a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity, and impact – generating transcontinental or inter-regional flows and networks of activity, interactions, and the exercise of power (Held et al. 1999:15-16, cf Stackhouse and Obenchain 2002:4).

Reform not Resistance

In the light of what we have seen two things are clear. We can neither embrace globalization uncritically nor can we ignore it or evade it as a demon. No doubt, globalization is associated with the possibilities of widening the inequalities both across and within nations, and of accelerating environmental degradation and the danger of international dominance by the developed nations, leaving some nations and regions behind on the road to development. At the same time globalization offers better business opportunities, rapid growth of knowledge and innovation and the prospect of better world peace. Globalization involves errors and destruction, aggravating poverty; but it has also potentialities for evolving a better humanity, inviting a vision of anticipating the ultimate destiny of human race as a complex and sacred civilization. Globalization, thus, is a providential help that points towards a new inclusive humanity and world. It can be interpreted as a providential progress towards humanity’s increasingly common history, though as in any human affair, requiring continuous ethical critique and guidance to sustain civilized life without drudgery, want, pain, suffering, injustice and premature death, and point toward the fullness of life for all.

Todaro and Smith have insisted: “International agreements are needed to level the globalization playing field for the poor” (Todaro and Smith 2009:590), some of them involving national changes, such as propping up corrupt governments. Such governments can be tamed through trade restrictions. Codes of conduct for multinational corporations have to be developed further. Life saving medicines can be made available at affordable price in poorer nations. Ways of linking the poorest nations into the chain of the globalization process in a healthy manner assume priority, especially for the sub-Saharan African nations, which to a large extent remain bypassed by the process.

Multinational Companies (MNCs) have contributed a critical share to the growth of international trade and capital flows in the recent decades through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), though most of these MNCs are based in the developed world, though not exclusively. Yet they cause also serious problems for the many developing countries. FDI has grown at a phenomenal level from a mere $2.4 billion in 1962 to a record $334 billion in 2005. However most of the flow had been to the developed countries or concentrating on a few developing countries like China that received $118 billion in 2005 (Todaro and Smith 2009:715), while Africa got a negligible $31 billion, with the least developed countries receiving the least. MNCs must mix humanitarian concerns such as poverty, inequality, employment conditions and environmental problems along with profit motives. China, again, is an example as to how national governments can negotiate better deals with MNCs in technology transfer and other conduct, but then few other nations can match China in size and centralized authority! Recently the WTO asked the US that the US Government subsidies amounting to more than $20 billion be withdrawn from Boeing Industry in response to the European complaints in defence of the Airbus Industry (BBC Report 2010:16 September). Chronic poverty and economic crisis in sub-Saharan Africa and other pockets of economic degradation require consolidated action with global interdependence. It should be born in mind that the international institutions such as the UN, IMF, WB, and WTO, all were instituted as part of the effort to bring world economic interactions under agreed principles of just law, after the end of colonialism, and for purposes such as helping poorer countries in their development.

How to ensure the full participation of the developing countries in the global economy, so that they too can benefit from international markets, has to become a moral issue for the international community. It has to be pointed out that when national markets are opening up it is ironic that some global financial markets remain restricted with protectionism against the agricultural products of less developed countries. Equally ironic is the fact that the real rate of interest paid by developing countries on borrowed capital is four times more than that paid by their industrialized counterparts. Todaro and Smith have emphasized, “If the 21st century is to hold greater promise for the many less developed countries that have been unable to share in the fruits of global progress, effective management of new global challenges - in money and finance, in environmental matters, in poverty traps, and in resources, labour and technology flows - will require reforms to the international system” (Todaro and Smith 2009:808).
This in turn is a judgement on the prevailing reality of humans being alienated from one another and from the Transcendent, in contrast to the ideal situation of the original harmony and peace described as Paradise in the Semitic traditions. In retrieving that vision for humanity today, even in a fractured way, globalization can serve as a help, a facilitating factor. This hope, no doubt, is based on religious faith, and is made manifest in the love of God and the neighbour, the mark of which is a just, open and pluralistic civilization. This, I believe, offers the basic orientation for all religions to serve humanity in the context of globalization, working for a just and open society, promoting a culture of love and respect for difference. As the Jewish Rabbi Jonathan Sacks advocated, dignity of difference has to be foundational to a globalized world (cf Sacks 2003). The substratum of the globalized world continues to be ethnically, religiously and culturally plural societies. It is a divinely given complex civilization to which all peoples bring their unique gifts. The spread of the ideals such as democracy, human rights, scientific education, international law and mass media, of technological skills, medical care, management techniques, are all related to globalization and as such they can contribute to the betterment of the quality of human existence anywhere, if practiced without strings and selfishness. Analysts show how the poor can find their way out of poverty by these values and become global participants (cf Stackhouse and Paris 2000).

Towards a Global Community

Galileo famously said that the Bible teaches how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go! Bearing that in mind we can recall how the biblical creation narrative refers to the entire bio-physical order and to humanity as such, which serves to develop ideas that shape or have shaped the dynamics of globalization. There is some sort of moral and spiritual meaning to existence as there is a Transcendent substratum that governs the purpose in life and there is a relationship of the Transcendent to the bio-physical world and the humans that inhabit it, and thus to the social and cultural history played out in the world. This in turn leads us to the inalienable relationship among the various players of the created world, more so among humans, as creatures with will and intellect participating in the divine care and concern. This biblical world-view makes room for novelty into what was there, through the Transcendent who brings into being and sustains the complex universe, and allows the complex universe itself to generate new forms of entities through interaction, rearrangement and construction. Though not always very clear to us, at the deepest levels the
universe works according to the immanent creative presence of God, enabling creation ever to become new, allowing unpredictable novelty to emerge, specific to each part of existence.

From this angle globalization can be understood as a process in socio-political human existence, parallel to mutations and adaptations in the physical world. What we have to ensure is that we respect always the spiritual and moral reasons in adopting new possibilities. Contemporary human technology is changing the face of the earth, rearranging nature by building complex cities and seeking ways to manage massive metropolitan areas by generating more and more value-added commodities for people to own and enjoy. In this process what is to be ensured is that the process does not force people to slide into poverty. All are to be carried along without marginalization or exploitation.

Realizing how humans find the benefits of modern societies such as clean water and food, medical care, longer life-span, better means of travel and communication, education, recreation and others, advocacy groups must use pressure on governments to make these facilities available to all especially to those who do not have access to them. Today we cannot imagine a situation of creating sociological zoos by making societies to return to the original simple and “natural” ways of life. The many NGOs can make their contribution by operating from genuine concerns of justice and peace leading to a humane existence for all humans in the globalized world, so that all can have life in full.

We must insist on a system delivering dignity, freedom and fair treatment to all citizens, as opposed to pursuing narrowly economic objectives enforced by certain state and commercial interests. We need a humane form of globalization based on human rights, wishing to extend the benefits of growth to all, and not just a few (Reader 2008:2). We have to admit that an exclusively dominant role of one nation alone, in the face of other growing economic powers can lead to a disturbing scenario. Dominic Smith has argued that if urban citizens throughout the world are denied decent democracy, if they are humiliated by the logic of the global market, then they will be tempted to follow new Hitlers, promising the rewards of revenge. It has happened before. If it happens again, we will be on our way to a third world war, terrified of humiliating decline, the increasingly powerful global nations in Europe and Asia coming together (Smith 2006:2).

Media and communication had a leading role in accelerating the process of globalization. They can be made use of for serving the cause of the poor. One of the leading causes of the marginalization of the poor is the rampant corruption at the civil and political levels. We can establish through communication media networks not only to promote solidarity with the poor but also to expose the ruthless corruption prevailing in countries, as happened in the case of India in connection with the Commonwealth Games. According to a BBC report on 15 September 2010, during 2007-2008 a webbing $750 billion were drained off from India to Europe by corrupt officials and politicians, money meant to serve the poor of the country.

Another area that needs attention is education. Education is the key to life in the globalized society both as a resource as well as to judge the society. According to reports, India is short of 1.2 million teachers and 42 million children aged between 6 and 14 do not go to school; 16 percent of villages do not have primary schooling facilities and 17 percent of schools have just one teacher, as admitted by Kapil Sibal in the upper house of the Parliament on September 4, 2010 (Times of India 2010:5 September). We can imagine the cascading effect it would have if only we succeeded in fixing this problem. Under William Carrey of Serampore and the Jesuits in Madurai and other places, modern education was introduced into India, which in turn sowed the seeds of renaissance in India and contributed to the birth of Indian nationalism, fanning the political and cultural awakening that led to the making of modern independent India.

The internationally renowned journal Concilium underlined: “There is an ardent yearning for a different order of things, for great human solidarity” (Sobrino and Wilfred 2001:9:13). According to most worldviews humanity is subject to a Transcendent bestowing on humans the double power of caring for the earth, bringing to fruition its possibilities and seeing to it that this is done under the moral principles of justice and truth, in common life. Humans have a vocational commitment to promote this two-fold obligation of ushering in progress towards common life and at the same time not infringing upon what is due to the other, justice which will sustain a more human society fomenting the possibilities of a more abundant and just society. When applied to globalization, we perceive it is part of the ever expanding vision of connectedness and interdependence, started already when tribal boundary crossing began. In this perspective, a globalization to which all nations can bring their gifts, would become part of the God-intended plan for humanity, at this end of the world
history. Surely it requires an inner transformation of every individual and society to orient all to a common end. The spread of education, medical care and democratic ideas such as the equality of men and women, of all races and the notion of the inalienable rights of humans, communication systems, technological innovations, economic opportunity, all to become contributing factors to an expansive vision for humanity. Accordingly, globalization, we may agree with Max Stackhouse, may be seen as a new form of service to humanity, inviting all the peoples of the world to be participants in a global civil society, at the same time critically evaluating when these developments go wrong, by correcting these and taking responsibility for ushering in the right climate for all to be players in the emerging new humanity (Stackhouse 2007:246).

Role of Advocacy

Globalization, with its positive and negative values and structures, brings on us human service organizations, the serious obligation of concrete, creative and sustained advocacy on behalf of the excluded and powerless sections of peoples. We have a serious obligation to bring change, leading to hope for all, so that “the hungry are filled with good things” (Lk 1:53). This ethical vision is a common ground shared by the world’s religious and spiritual traditions, as the Declaration of the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions indicates (Stackhouse 2007:58). It is an invitation to religions of the world, not to fight against globalization per se, but against greed and selfishness that choke values such as benevolence, justice, honesty and communion. The work of many religious organizations like Caritas World Vision and others are doing a great service to change the world.

The political and economic powers frequently offer only one choice of increased production. We have an obligation to change the system from quantity to quality, where human beings live in joy and peace. This requires a service of influencing decision makers so that decisions at all levels are motivated not only by concerns of economic gains but more so by the concerns of welfare and humanization of human life for all. There has to be greater diffusion of core meaning and values shared by all humankind. A commitment to global values such as tolerance, democracy, progress, and human rights, will lead to a global future of peaceful cooperation in an interdependent and culturally diverse world. It is a matter of becoming carriers of meaning against the dominant culture of consumption, propagated by the powerful. We become not exactly the voice of the poor, but enablers so that the poor can be heard by a globalization of solidarity.

We have a vocation to help to create a better, fairer global community. In fact the cumulative effect of religious persons, with their commitment, decisions and actions has made a substantial difference to globalization to make it one with a human face.

The activities of various religious and secular NGOs and religious organizations have contributed to the growing notion of a global civil society. Many of them are involved in inter-faith relations, human rights advocacy, humanitarian relief and international development. The role and contribution of the growing body of academic literature and gatherings of scholars are also to be acknowledged. Scott Thomas has demonstrated the significance of research that must bring together scholars and theologians with a background in both the social ethics of the main world religions and the theory of international society (Thomas 2002:137).

A global ethic is called for that moves beyond the values of profit and self-expediency toward an alternative vision and practice with the potential to transform any structure that disenfranchises the poor and push them to the outer rims of the society. Maureen H. O’Connell shows how “we need a global approach to ethics that helps us evaluate more critically the external outcomes of globalization from a variety of perspectives” (O’Connell 2009:187). Globalization is not a self-propelled phenomenon, seeking its own ends, rather “the objectives of globalization are determined by the vision of those who create and sustain it” (O’Connell 2009:188). Hence it has to be shaped and directed according to the basic principle of what it means to be human and to live in a community.

Conclusion

The current process of globalization, despite its drawbacks and its negative impact, on sections of populations, as result of human greed, through its scope, structure, force and meaning, is making the world smaller and is shaping a wider public essentially social and very much consonant with the convictions of most religions, particularly of Christianity. The impact of the phenomenon cannot be limited to economic aspects alone, rather it is a civilizational shift that involves the growth of a world-wide civil society, engendering nation states, at geographical and cultural level, where the global community finds itself incarnated within a specific and sovereign national identity. In contrast to economic globalization that has left a trail of woes to the poor, we must globalize hope and the quest for justice through the ways of acceptance and rights leading to peace. We need an integral globalization that provides the material and cultural
foundation for everyone to a life, worthy of human dignity. In short we are left with the task of struggling against a false globalization that only divides, to a true world order, based on shared human values.

References