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**Global Civil Society, Construction of Knowledge
And The Practice of Adult Education
By**

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We are living at a momentous period of human history. This period is being characterised in different ways by different political leaders, practitioners and academics. Two common themes across such descriptions are globalisation and information. It has been variously argued that the humanity is moving towards greater global inter - connectedness and knowledge societies. Globalisation and learning are, therefore, contemporary arenas for discourse and debates.

There is an increasingly articulated reference to a third construct of this discourse: civil society. The discourse on civil society, however, is not particularly linked to the discourse on globalisation and knowledge/learning. Yet, increasingly new pressures are pushing towards a greater recognition of emerging global civil society. At the same time, learning and knowledge are being acquired, used and articulated from the struggles of citizens themselves.

This paper is an attempt to weave these three phenomena together. It describes the emerging forces of globalisation, with a particular reference to Asia - Pacific. It argues for an intellectual recognition of civil society as an arena for knowledge production. And it then explores implications for the practice of adult education arising from the inter action between globalisation, civil society and learning. In doing so, it tries to engage the proponents of globalisation and civil society with the practice of adult educators on the ground.

Globalisation

Bulk of the debate on globalisation focuses on the rise of Multinational Corporations, flows of capital, exchange of technology and broadening trade. In some ways, the world is already becoming a global economy with strong ties across financial institutions, capital markets and productive enterprises. This trend is to be juxtaposed with emerging regional blocks largely built around economic and trade co - operation. European Union, NAFTA, MERCOSUR, APEC, ASEM, ASEAN, SAARC, Indian Ocean Rim, etc. are essentially a phenomena of the 1990s. Nearly 50 years ago, the United Nations system had begun to build global connections across governments, while the Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank & IMF) had begun to influence global economic development paradigms. (Seitz, 1995)

Yet, it is useful to keep in perspective the long history of cross - cultural relations in the Asia - Pacific region. Much before the birth of Christ, intellectual, spiritual and economic relations had substantially developed across the Himalayas, the forests of

Siam, the sea of Sumatra and the Mekong river. Trade routes of silk, spices and tea, teachings of Lord Buddha and joint protection of sea routes had demonstrated advanced globalisation in this region. Exchange of scholars and teachers across China, the Indian subcontinent and into the Arab world had profoundly affected the scope of learning and knowledge in our region.

Yet, in some significant ways, the globalisation of today is qualitatively different. Its reach, speed and connectivity are of a much higher order than anything human civilization has witnessed before. Therefore, this globalisation offers certain opportunities and presents many constraints unparalleled in human history.

Constraints

Among the major constraints noted by many scholars and critics of globalisation, four are briefly described here. ***First***, globalization is taking place in a situation of inequality across countries and regions – inequality which increased dramatically due to rapid economic development in the North in 1950 – 70 period. Today, only 20% of global GDP is the share of 80% of population in the developing countries. Even within countries, poorest 20% of the population average about 5% of national income in developing countries (UNDP 1996). As a result, relationships across unequal partner countries is resulting in increased domination by the powerful over relatively powerless. This domination across countries is acquired through capital, technology and unequal terms of exchange and trade. Multinational capital flows and WTO seem to be reinforcing such inequality (Krut, 1997).

Secondly, rapid economic development in the North has become a "model" of development for countries of the South. Newly Industrialising Countries (NIC), near NIC and Asian Tigers are illustrations of blind copying of "western" development paradigms without its linkages to the indigenous cultures and conditions. Globalisation has further intensified the adoption of this model of development in countries of the South. This race for economic development tends to reinforce singularity of approach to development.

This model of rapid industrialisation and faster rates of economic growth (10 – 15% per annum) have resulted in much faster and deeper ecological degradation and destruction in countries of our region. Globalisation further fuels export of hazardous industry, processes, products and wastes to countries of our region. (Griesgraber and Gunter, 1995)

Thirdly, existing inequalities across countries in Asia – Pacific and inequalities within these countries have resulted in further skewed economic conditions. A section of urban - industrial population and rural landed elite benefit much more from globalisation and its attendant economic opportunities. Elites across various countries of our region have built strong economic linkages, taking advantage of globalisation. The poor, rural poor in particular, the illiterate and unskilled remain largely excluded from this process of globalisation. This has led to the exclusion of vast sections of these societies from being either producers or consumers in the market place. (Tandon, 1991)

Finally, globalisation is bringing in its wake tendencies towards cultural homogenisation. Uniformity in food, dress, language is wiping out the valuable social diversity rooted in long cultural practices of people in countries of Asia - Pacific region. Uniformity, unipolarism and a singular view of 'good life' is being perpetuated world -wide through a systematic process of ideational hegemony. Electronic media, internet and global tourism have hastened these processes of cultural homogenis ation.

Opportunities

Along with these rather serious constraints and potentially disastrous consequences to humanity and ecology, globalisation potentially offers certain new opportunities. It is helpful to acknowledge them as well.

Firstly, globalization is associated with ***economic liberalization***. It implies access to new products, technology, markets. Increasing trade, technology transfer and capital flows across countries and regions is generally associated with immigration of human skills and competencies. In Asia-Pacific region, new economic opportunities have opened up enormous possibilities for many countries and societies. As restrictions on economic investments are lifted, and as macro economic policies are developed to encourage initiative, entrepreneurship among individuals and families flourishes. (ASPBAE Courier, 1992)

Secondly, contemporary globalisation is also associated with the changing role of the state. The modern concept of nation - state, with centralised system of governance controlled administration and bureaucracy and maintenance of law and order through police and military was implanted on countries of the South after second World War. Deep and wide control over natural/physical resources and

human activity has been exercised by the state in the past fifty years, be it a democratic state, singly party (Marxist) state or military dictatorship. Globalisation is creating the possibility of greater political space for citizens, less centralised and more decentralised local self - governance, reform and curtailment of omniscient and omnipotent state in many Southern countries. There is a growing demand for citizen participation in the governance of their affairs. Transparency and accountability of public agenda, decision - making and public officials is being demanded. Globalisation has also opened doors (and minds) to diverse political perspectives and aspirations. *Democracy and respect of human rights* are powerful new ideas flowing through many societies of our region. Beyond narrow ethnic or religious identity, globalisation is opening possibilities for more humane, non - sectarian, global citizenship. (Korsgaard, 1995)

Finally, globalisation is today associated with enormous opportunities for information. New technology has opened new frontiers of sharing, learning and knowing, hitherto inaccessible to many in different parts of the world. Globalisation is being supported through new information revolution; and globalisation in turn is promoting opportunities to access distant and instant information. Knowledge as a source of power is getting increasingly democratised and more widely distributed.

Therefore, globalisation and democratisation are presently closely associated, just as globalisation and economic liberalisation are closely associated.

Global Civil Society

Budd Hall offers a forceful argument for deepening our understanding of emerging contours of global civil society. In its myriad forms, citizens and their associations are building connections across communities and borders to share and learn, to act in solidarity with and for emerging struggles, and to acknowledge the essential common ground across all humanity. (Hall, 1997)

The most visible forms such actions have taken in recent history are in support of struggle against apartheid in South Africa and in sharing resources to rebuild families and communities in war ravaged parts of Africa, Central America, Europe, Middle - east and Asia.

Second form of interconnections can be seen in the growing presence and voice of citizens and development NGOs during United Nations Conferences on Literacy,

Environment, Human Rights, Women, Population, Social Development, etc., etc. (de Oliveira and Tandon, 1994)

A third trend can be seen in the emergence of global coalitions across civil society actors to hold global institutions accountable. Monitoring of and advocacy with the United Nations agencies (commissions on Sustainable Development, Human Rights, etc.) and private global corporations (Shell Oil, Union Carbide, etc.) are new forms of building global civil society.

In addition, new formations are emerging in support of global civil society itself. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation provides one such platform for nearly 500 civil society organisations in 85 countries of the world.

The base document making the case for CIVICUS thus described this phenomena:

'Citizens Strengthening Global Society'

"The same process that globalise problems also globalise their possible solutions. Global civil society is a new concept. Will it be capable of generating the energy and resources needed to cope with global problems and concerns? Recent history gives us reasons for hope. And hope can also be strengthened by inspired, principled human action".

"All these challenges indicate that the time is ripe for citizens to act boldly to strengthen the trends toward global solidarity and planetary citizenship".

(CIVICUS, Strengthening Global Civil Society, Washington, 1994)

Construction of Knowledge

Philosophers and practitioners alike have debated the meaning of knowledge and its epistemological anchoring throughout human history. There is an increasing consensus that understanding social reality implies social construction of knowledge. A deeper examination of this perspective requires an analysis of knowledge system and how it is socially constructed. (Tandon, 1982)

Knowledge system is a complex enterprise which includes a number of elements.

The first element is the <u>epistemology</u> of knowledge. It is the theory or belief as to how knowledge develops, how authentic understanding of social reality is developed.

The second component is the form and manner in which knowledge is presented, organised, and articulated.

The third element is the dissemination of that knowledge, its communication to others who may benefit by understanding and using this knowledge.

The fourth element is the institutional mechanism of knowledge producers and knowledge users, knowledge consumers, etc.

In another sense one could examine the intellectual, material and institutional base of knowledge systems. The intellectual base defines the epistemological and philosophical aspects of knowledge. This is the question of 'knowledge for what' and how it is produced. The political economy of knowledge (Brown and Tandon, 1983) is addressed through its material base: who is involved in production of knowledge, who provides the resources, how these resources are distributed, how decisions to apply resources to different components of the knowledge enterprise are made, etc.

The institutional base describes the manner in which the knowledge system is organised. This includes researchers, institutions for training of researchers, mechanisms for certification of researchers, formal systems of examining the validity, reliability and generalisability of knowledge produced by one part of the enterprise, etc. The totality of these elements comprises the knowledge system.

The modern enterprise in knowledge system has grown parallel to the industrial revolution of the last 300 years. Knowledge about the physical sciences and realities began to explode with the industrial revolution as demands for new knowledge increased. In the post - industrial informational age, transformation of knowledge systems is taking place in response to the reorganisation of the dominant social, economic and political systems of our times.

Nation - State and Construction of Knowledge

In the past century, two major determinants of construction of knowledge systems had been modern nation - states and modern corporate – market actors (Dickson, 1988). Nation - states in Europe and North America had organised much before the second World War. The post - colonial countries constructed a modern nation - state in the last five decades. In various parts of the world, the state has played a major role in construction of knowledge systems during this period. It has defined priorities for knowledge, it has provided the resources, it has created institutional

mechanisms for certification, review and dissemination of knowledge in physical sciences and social sciences. Nation - states through their agencies, departments and ministries have significantly controlled, determined and shaped the construction of modern knowledge systems. (Brown and Tandon, 1983)

Corporations and Construction of Knowledge

During the early part of this century, the rise of modern - corporate market system began to enter the area of shaping construction of knowledge and knowledge systems. The demands and requirements of modern corporate enterprises began to define priority areas for research, provide resources, creating institutions as well as channels and mechanisms of dissemination and use. In recent years, patenting of knowledge and measures like intellectual property rights have been used by corporations to profit from universally relevant and useful human knowledge. Knowledge and knowledge systems are now being monopolised and controlled by modern corporate market institutions. (Sosa, 1991)

In countries of the South, the neo - liberal consensus is now beginning to promote the rise of modern corporate - market actors. As a result, enormous efforts are being made by the market - corporate sector to shape the construction of knowledge and knowledge systems in countries of the South. With the declining resources and capacities of the state in many countries of the South, the relative influence of the corporate - market institutions in shaping knowledge and knowledge systems has increased dramatically in recent years.

Civil Society and Construction of Knowledge Systems

Before the advent of modern nation - state and modern market actors, a lot of human activity was organised in communities, across families, in groups and association, by people and their families, in groups and associations, by people and their families, by citizen themselves (Tandon, 1991). This included a wide range of social and cultural activities; it included managing community resources; it included economic exchange of goods and services; it comprised of mutual help and sharing of resources; it included mutual influence and control in face of conflicts and disagreements. Such an associational life with its own institutional and material base was widely developed in different parts of the world. This stream of human activity and this method of organising/declined in the last five decades since its resource base was snatched away and its legitimacy was undermined by the state. Therefore, a third basis of

understanding contemporary society must also be understood in terms of its influence in shaping knowledge and knowledge systems. <u>This is the essence of the role of civil society and the construction of knowledge Systems.</u> (PRIA, 1985)

What therefore is the base of knowledge in civil society?

The essential base knowledge in civil society is life itself. In pursuit of various activities of daily living, in managing the family, community, the land, forest, water, in looking after the health and hunger of one's own family, in producing and consuming goods and service, life creates a vast series of experiences. Thus life itself becomes the base for understanding social reality and becomes the source of knowledge in civil society.

Related but equally important part of this is the daily problem - solving that occurs in the course of managing one's family, community and society. As problems repeat themselves over a period of time, our experience in solving them again and again builds a body of knowledge, not only among us, but in the family and the community. Problem - solving around issues of daily life and living becomes the basis for understanding reality for a vast section of humanity throughout the two millennium.

Survival in the face of hardships, in the face of difficult physical and ecological circumstances has been a dominant mode of existence. Different communities and sections of societies develop different interests over a period of time. Their differences get contested in physically controlling the use of such natural resources as well as in controlling the minds of people. It is this struggle, this contest across communities, associations, classes, ethnic and linguistic groups, gender, which has been a major basis for developing new understanding and knowledge about human reality.

The fourth important base of knowledge has been intergenerational. Civil society operates through a network of informal arrangements, many of which pass through generations within families, communities and social groups. This tradition across generations becomes the basis for regularly refining, sharpening, improving our understanding and knowledge and about different aspects of human endeavor. The intergenerational component of civil society knowledge base thus acquires a different order and quality than what could be called inter - professional base of modern knowledge systems.

Knowledge Form

The second arena to examine the civil society and construction of knowledge systems is the form of knowledge. This knowledge system is <u>knowledge – in - use</u>. Here, the purpose of understanding is action and change (Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991). Understanding reality is not a pursuit in itself, but in order to use that understanding for one's own life, that of the family, community and wider society. Therefore, knowledge – in - use is the form of civil society knowledge systems. (Tandon, 1994)

The second aspect of this from is the experimental nature of this knowledge. Since the base of knowledge is essentially life, life problems, struggle and contest across different groups and communities, it is the experience and analysis of that experience, individually and collectively which provides the form of knowledge. Such an experimental form is immediately relevant to knowledge – in - use and relies heavily on life experiences of individuals and collectives.

<u>Third</u> aspect is the axiomatic nature of this knowledge form, where principles of understanding are translated into do's and don'ts. These axioms take the shape of operational principles so that they can be continuously relevant in action and in daily life. What may appear as an otherwise simplistic set up of axiomatic principles of do's and don'ts in daily behaviour, is actually a strong basis of such knowledge form. (Brenda, 1990, quoted in Tandon, 1994)

Finally, this knowledge form of civil society knowledge system depends on oral exchange, dialogue and communication. It survives through word – of - mouth, through symbols, through rhythms, songs, dance music and art. Such an oral tradition has been the strength of civil society knowledge form. However, in today's literate and written word context, the knowledge system in oral form needs to be articulated and documented for future use.

The generation, use and articulation of knowledge from the actions and struggles of citizens and their associations is a key to advancing human understanding in such key areas as sustainable agriculture, ecology, gender relations, human health, spirituality and peace. Yet, the recognition and understanding of the civil society as an arena for knowledge construction is only beginning to occur.

Practice of Adult Education

Much of the practice of adult education has been focused upon individual and learners and their groups. Creating learning opportunities through learner centered approaches and methods is what adult educators know best, and do most of the time. New insights and learnings generated from such practice of adult education have not been systematically documented in the past.

Participatory Research emerged twenty years ago as a methodology that combined study, learning and action. The historical and intellectual roots of Participatory Research were in the practice of emancipatory and libertarian adult education with marginalised citizens in countries of South and the North. It provided a base for practitioners of adult education in diverse community settings to systematise lessons from their practice.

Thus adult education centrs, for a, settings and projects become spaces for articulation of new knowledge from the experiences and analysis of the adult learners themselves. Participatory Research thus became the methodology of anchoring the articulation of new knowledge in the practice of ordinary citizens. As a methodology, it gave voice to the civil society to articulate and represent its knowledge. As a global project, Participatory Research and its networks of practitioners and champions provided an early space for global civil society to record, systematise and communicate this knowledge – in - use by ordinary women and men. (Brown and Tandon, 1983)

With the wide - spread and broader acceptance of Participatory Research methodology world - wide, legitimisation of civil society spaces for new knowledge production and communication has become even more important. The contemporary reality of globalisation and the emergence of global civil society, however, pose new challenges for the practice of adult education globally. In exploring those challenges, it is hoped that the adult education fraternity will engage in deeper reflection and conceptualisation of the roles of adult education in strengthening global civil society as well.

As a contribution to responsive and libertarian human development in the context of globalisation, several important roles need to be, and can be played by adult education.

First, adult education can assist individuals and communities to understand the nature and dynamics of change ushered in by globalisation. It can assist families and groups to learn the implications of these changes for their life, work, country and citizenship. Without systematic and well - designed learning opportunities created through adult education, many individuals and communities are bewildered and disoriented by the speed and scope of these changes, which are rendering traditional and habitual ways of behaving obsolete. In the absence of enlightened understanding of these changes, tendencies towards inward - looking or living in the past get reinforced; the need of the hour is outward and future - oriented. (Korsgaard, 1995)

Second, as individuals and families move to new locations in search of economic opportunities created by globalisation, they find themselves in alien and at times, inhospitable habitats. Migrants face exclusion, ostracisation and intimidation. Rapid increase in intra - country and inter - country migration in large numbers are creating unsettled habitation, both in departing and host locations and neighbourhoods. Adult education must address this issue of integration of new migrants by assisting those who arrive, as well as those who receive. The ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious composition of our communities is changing rapidly. Widespread heterogeneity and diversity characterise the composition of these neighbourhoods. Learning to live with diversity, tolerance for differences and solidarity towards distant others are needed to make these settlements into communities. Adult Education can contribute towards this direction. In the absence of these interventions of learning, migration is seen as a threat, and breeds isolation and hostility.

Third, new economic opportunities are passing by those who are illiterate and unskilled. Computer literacy has become crucial in the new information age. Restructuring of economies and reorganization of trade and industry requires newer and different sets of skills and competencies. Nature of work, work place and environment are all changing rapidly. Adult education must provide tool to access literacy, computer literacy and new skills and capacities, particularly for those hitherto excluded from the process of economic liberalisation. Vocational education, multi - skilling and developing new forms of learning opportunities suited to the needs of each individual are making great demands on the practice of adult education world - wide.

Fourth, the newly emerging Asian economic crisis is casting fresh doubts over the model of development characterized by unbridled rapid growth. Thousands are getting unemployed; millions are facing extreme economic hardships; social consequences of new economic crisis in Asia are promoting citizens and their associations to find ways to learn the language of macro-economics and global capitalist enterprise. It also catalyzing further demands for creating and strengthening systems of life-long learning and education. Global civil society response to this economic crisis is thus generating new forms of learning and struggle.

Fifth, decentralisation and devolution of governance to local levels is creating new opportunities for political participation. Ordinary people have been hitherto passively dependent on centralised government and inefficient bureaucracy. They need to become citizens, citizens need to learn how to govern their own communities and arrange their common resources for public good. New capacities, confidence and assertion of citizenship is required for local self - governance to become a reality in many societies. Adult education can assist this process of self - governance and decentralisation of decision making by enabling and preparing citizens and their associations to build their capacities for the same. In the process, accountability of governance structures and just and equitable processes of public decision - making may get reinforced.

Finally, individuals and families are experiencing up rootedness from their histories traditions and cultures in the face of these changes. Cultural practices and institutions in many traditional societies have existed for long and been well - developed. As a result, cultural transitions are appearing to be traumatic and painful. What is needed is a fresh synthesis of the old and the new; synthesis of the traditional and the modern, synthesis of the local and the global. New identity needs to be built which imbibes the new while retaining the old. Adult education can perhaps assist individuals and their families to redefine and reshape their identity in harmony with the old culture, and, in response to the contemporary urges.

In conclusion, the practice of adult education is challenged to encompass a broader range of perspectives in its framework of adult learning. It is challenged to contribute to the strengthening of global civil society. It is also encouraged to engage citizens in analysing and understanding global forces impinging their daily life. Above all, it is invited to nurture and revitalize the intellectual space for civil society through its

contribution to knowledge and learning. This space is facing the risk of being captured by global institutions, on the strength of their global hegemony and enormous resource base. Can the fraternity of adult educators, through its own civil society networks and association, act in a concerted and united manner to occupy this crucial space?

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