CHAPTER-VII
Assessing WOMP : Towards a Critique

It is easy to dismiss WOMP as a dismal failure. Critics would not be wrong in pointing out that none of the core values of WOMP have been realised even remotely. The world is still ridden with both domestic and international conflicts; large segments of populations across the globe continue to suffer from poverty, unemployment, backwardness, poor health, low life expectancy and illiteracy; democracy is non-existent or precarious in several countries; human rights are routinely violated; inequality of all kinds persist; and ecological crisis has only deepened. Let alone in the 1990s, we are no closer even in the middle of 2000s to what the ‘preferred world’ ought to be. In retrospect, the WOMP appears to have woven nothing but naive and empty dreams.

What seems to make such criticism legitimate is the nature of WOMP claims. Its proponents had, after all, striven hard to give their work a ‘scientific’ character. They were not interested in abstract or contra-factual philosophical engagement with normative questions. They were, in their own assessment, doing ‘policy research.’ They set values as goals to be achieved, they looked for ‘operational definitions’ of these values, they worked out ‘strategies’ and time-frame for making transition from the actual to the desirable, and even designed quantitative indices for measuring progress. They claimed their work was not only analytical and practical but also predictive. They wished to be taken seriously as futurologists. The founder director of the project had claimed there could be “no question” that world government would be achieved by the year 2000. He and his colleagues were proved utterly wrong. Could they not now hide behind the common excuse that large-scale but unanticipated developments do occur sometimes, as they did in the late 1980s and early 1990s? They better admit that their ‘science’ was unsound if not altogether bogus.
There is no defending the WOMP theorists on these counts. The first thing they must do is admit that their ‘science’ had indeed let them down. They could then claim that they were not the only ones so let down. Realists of ‘scientific’ temperament did not come out any less scathed by the unanticipated developments. Social ‘scientists’ of all descriptions had often met the same fate in the last five decades. One might argue therefore that there was something bogus about the whole project of building social and behavioural sciences, so fashionable and so dominant in the 1960s, particularly so in the United States. WOMP was formally launched in the late 1960s in the United States. It simply got ensnared. We must remember that WOMP did not start that way. In its formative years, it was more ‘traditional’ in its espousal of peace.

There has been a long tradition of social inquiry associated with the spirit of Enlightenment: a combination of faith in rationalism, progress and science. Many idealists and visionaries were drawn to it. Marx was one of them. He too made predictions which went terribly wrong. His communist vision was never realised. But is his analysis and critique of capitalism proved wrong by that failure? In all such cases, a more balanced approach would be to separate the analytical from the predictive and the prescriptive. WOMP should be no exception.

II

If in methodological terms the limitations of WOMP were actually the limitations of ‘scientific’ enterprise in social ‘sciences’, in philosophical terms its limitations were limitations of Liberalism. WOMP was out and out a liberal project in its assumptions, aspirations, predilections and prejudices. Its complete aversion to the very idea of revolutionary politics, not as a virtue but even as a necessary evil, remained undiminished even when its preferred politics of intellectual and pedagogic engagement bore no fruit. WOMP started off as a project of Western - in fact American – liberals. However, even when the narrow base was sought to be expanded by including non-Western
theorists, those thus included were all liberals, whether they came from Asia or Africa. 1960s were the decade of ideological juxtapositions, but WOMP never thought of including in its ranks a Soviet, East European or independent Marxist, or even a non-Marxist socialist. WOMP sought to build a world order model after dropping half the ideological world of that time from its considerations. WOMP thus opened itself to the charge that it was doing nothing but packing in suitably subtle idealist disguise a form of Pax-Americana.

This charge could not have been more unfair. WOMP was liberal, no doubt, but it was the most comprehensive liberal critique of the dominant liberal assumptions, arrangements and institutions which characterised postwar ‘free world’. Falk was vociferous about the ‘invisible oppression’ which marked First World democracies. If Third World intellectuals found Soviet style socialism attractive despite its authoritarianism, the reason was that most brutish forms of capitalism in the Third World were tolerated, even encouraged and sponsored, by the First World ‘liberal’ regimes. Kim located the roots of most existing problems in the inequities of liberal capitalist international order. All WOMP theorists were critical of the Bretton Woods institutions, they highlighted the structures of dependence these institutions had created and perpetuated, and the peripheralisation and pauperisation they had caused in the Third World. WOMP theorist supported the demand for a New International Economic Order.

WOMP argued how metropolitan capitalism controlled world-wide the production and distribution not merely of material goods, but also ideas and knowledge. Its hold over global academia and popular media was so complete that it could reproduce endlessly in the Third World, replicas of its own image. Modernisation theory was a prime example of such concealed manipulation. Propagated by the American social theorists of the 1950s and 1960s, the theory promised a painless passage to progress and prosperity to the Third World policy planners, alluring them into giving its preference over its alternatives, be these the Soviet style planning and regulation of economy or the more indigenous and locally specific paths of development.
WOMP theorists, particularly Rajni Kothari, built a trenchant critique of this model of development, showing that it had not merely failed miserably in delivering the goods but had also led to massive dislocations and unprecedented human suffering, increased gap between the rich and the poor, unemployment, serious ethnic and racial tensions, dependence on massive external borrowings and vulnerability to external pressures. A small, capital-intensive modern sector had been created at the expense of large, labour-intensive, subsistence based sectors of economy.

Global capitalism thrived by not merely creating dependency in investments and manufacturing but also promoting consumerist aspirations. Fight against it involved therefore not merely creating autonomous and self-reliant alternative models of production, but also creating artificial needs. WOMP theorists were in favour of not only an alternative path of development but an alternative notion of development itself, based the notion of meeting the minima of ‘basic human needs.’ They gave a call for ‘ethics of consumption.’ Over-consumption lead as much to social distortions and destruction as did forced under-consumption in the backward economies.

Not all liberals, however, would be equally vehement in their criticism of world capitalist economy. WOMP critique is a product not of liberalism per se, but of a particular kind of liberalism. This later kind of liberalism is not a champion of unbridled freedom of market or international trade; it has no stomach for instability, inequities and injustice which laissez faire can often produce. WOMP’s liberalism reflects a clear preference for political liberalism heavily infused with a welfarist spirit over the economic liberalism represented by libertarians.

III

WOMP is much better known for its critique of Realist and Neo-Realist interpretation of international relations as well as ‘world order.’ The critique challenges in fundamental ways the core assumptions made by these interpretations.
The most fundamental assumption of Realism relates to the centrality, sanctity and irreplacibility of states as basic constituent actors of world politics. WOMP has a more pluralist view and believes that non-state actors such as transnational organisations, sub-national groups and people's movements play an increasingly important role in the contemporary world. More crucially, non-state actors change the very nature of world politics because they are neither prisoners of 'national security' paradigm, nor do they engage in conflict producing competitive struggle for power. In such a world, there is no room for taking lightly what was earlier dismissed as 'legal-institutional' approach. What is needed instead is transforming the nature and functioning of both international law and international organisations. If need be, the UN Charter should be changed to allow for an effective interface with non-state actors. International law too should be reoriented to reflect the needs not merely of states but also of 'communities'. WOMP rejected Realist description of world politics as 'anarchical' and refused to see the division between domestic and international domains as water tight. Rather, it wished to blur the distinction by 'domesticating international politics' and 'externalising domestic politics.' It even suggested the creation of a 'transnational police force' which would operate simultaneously in both domains.

At another level, WOMP postulated the notion of human security and thereby threw a fundamental challenge to Realist notion of 'security' which is narrow, militaristic and territorial. Such notions of security breed 'militarism', a syndrome which perpetuates itself, serves narrow elite interests and endangers human survival by creating a 'war system', inducing wars and arms race. Human security on the other hand protects and promotes people's livelihood, dignity, social and political justice and healthy environment.

Closely related to the Realist notion of security is the Realist notion of peace. Desire for peace is subordinated in Realism to the need for security, and is therefore sought as a secondary value. WOMP very quickly outgrew negative definition of peace as absence of war and postulated a positive notion of 'just peace' denoting harmonisation of interests. WOMP also
broadened the scope of peace efforts by viewing violence as a pathology and addressing all forms of collective violence rather than just war.

IV

In the light of the comments made in the foregoing sections, it should be easy to see that the relevance of WOMP has increased even though the movement itself might have declined. Globalisation as we witness it today has a neo-liberal agenda which undermines self-reliance by forcing the removal of all protectionist policies. At the same time it is based on US hegemony which reflects the changed structure of power hierarchy in the post-Soviet world. Yet globalisation comes packaged as a panacea for all global ills, thanks to the dominance of American and Western domination of academia and mass media. So overwhelming is this dominance that conventional vocabularies of resistance – emanating in nationalist, regionalist and radical socialist discourses – have been considerably eroded. There is a dire need for reconstructing an effective vocabulary to combat globalisation.

Globalism visualised by the WOMP theorists continues to offer us such a vocabulary. Falk’s conceptualisation of ‘humane governance’ based on ‘globalisation from below’ is particularly relevant in the age of ‘globalisation from above.’

WOMP’s contemporary relevance is best described as a ‘counter-hegemonic’ project as it was outlined by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci had shown how the materially dominant class used its own normative and conceptual vocabulary in a manner that it could be uncritically internalised by the dominated classes. He called this the process of hegemonisation. He argued that socio-political emancipation was virtually impossible if such internalised beliefs were not systematically destroyed by counterposing alternative ideas. Gramsci pointed out that this was a slow process that often experienced setbacks.

Considering this, WOMP’s setback must be seen with what Kim called ‘concerned optimism’ rather than abject pessimism.