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## UNIT 16 GANDHIAN CIVIL SOCIETY FOR GLOBAL PEACE

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### 16.1 INTRODUCTION

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Gandhi is one of the pioneers who were critical of the modern civil society at a time when nobody dared to do so. This he did it through his seminal work, *Hind Swaraj* on the one hand and by adopting constructive work based on non-violence on the other. This is where Gandhi becomes important for understanding civil society. In fact, in the recent past, Gandhi has become an important figure in this discourse, and also in the politics of civil society across the world. These civil societies are either in the form of social movements or in the form of non-governmental organisations. These organisations are led by Gandhians on the one hand and the different social activists on the other. In the latter case they largely invoke Gandhi in their struggle to bring ever lasting peace. Peace is now understood not only in terms of absence of war, but also in terms of removing hunger, poverty, domination, exploitation, hegemony, cultural dislocation, displacement and dispossession etc. It is true that Gandhi has grown beyond the boundaries of India -not only during his life time but also after his death. He has become truly global. This is obvious from the way the United Nations General Assembly, on 15 June 2007, declared to observe 2<sup>nd</sup> October as the International Day of Non-Violence. In fact Gandhi is very much apparent in the Global Peace Movement, Ecology movement, anti-war movement, anti-globalisation movement, and also movement against nuclear world. His influence has surpassed nation, nationalism, ethnicity including nationality too. This makes us to argue that there are "multiple Gandhis"- Gandhi of the State, Gandhi of the masses, Gandhi of the civil Society and Mythic Gandhi. It is true that Gandhi was for permanent global peace and was against tyranny and oppression. His engagement with Hitler and other

fascists during his life time clearly shows that Gandhi was against tyranny and authoritarianism and also that he believed in everlasting global peace.

### **Aims and Objectives**

After going through this Unit, you would be able to

- Study Gandhian Civil Society during his time;
- Know the nature of Gandhian civil society;
- Analyse the anti-globalisation movement which espoused Gandhian principles; and
- Evaluate the problems facing everlasting peace.

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## **16.2 PROBLEM OF DEFINING CIVIL SOCIETY**

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During his life time Gandhi led many struggles as part of nationalist movement. In fact there are arguments as to whether nationalist movement be treated as civil society movement or not. Couple of scholars argue that Gandhi led movement was nothing but “civil society” movement (Jayaram, 2004). On the contrary, others would argue that nationalist movement cannot be treated or categorised as civil society. This is because of the fact that there are no precise meanings to understand “Civil Society. It is quite often seen as a space between the State and Society. There are others who refuse to use the term civil society.-they would use the term” political society: instead of civil society. It is generally believed that civil society is a secular space, or a space meant to uphold democratic values, a space for dialogue, a space for discourse and a space to recognise the identities. Even there are arguments which believed that civil society is pitted against the State- particularly whenever the state goes against the interest of democracy, it becomes obligatory on the part of the civil society to uphold democratic values. Meanwhile it is also seen as a space which weakens the state too, as it tries to fill in the space left over by the State. There are others who would argue that more the number of civil societies, the State variably becomes open, secular, and democratic. Therefore it is argued that to strengthen democracy and to retain the individual identity it is essential to have large number of civil societies.

Second important argument centred on whether all forms of struggles – be it reactionary, fascist including radical movements – can be categorised as civil society. Incidentally many scholars have clubbed even anti-communist movement, fascist movement as civil society movement. For example, Solidarity movement in the Poland during late 1980s is termed as civil society movement. This is the reason why Gandhi-led Nationalist movement can also be called Civil Society Movement. Secondly, even the non-governmental organisations have been called as Civil Society.

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## **16.3 GANDHI’S NOTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

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Quite often Gandhi’s civil society and Gandhian Civil Society are used interchangeably as if both are one and the same. In fact Gandhi can be called “First Critic of Modern Civil Society” particularly in the context of nationalist movement. Gandhi’s critique of Civil Society is very much apparent in his seminal work, *Hind Swaraj*. His argument about western civilisation “a civilisation only in name” can be seen as the beginning of his larger critique. Further his critique centred on modernity, western culture, and western institutions.

Gandhi's Civil Society had its own characteristics: it believed in dialogue among the social categories, absence of social conflict, unity among communities, non-violence, and stressed the need for constructive programme. Gandhi fundamentally believed in "reconstructing civil society". For Gandhi Civil Society is a site of peaceful co-existence, dialogue, and democratic practices wherein every individual's autonomy as well as identity is recognised. Gandhi believed that use of "force", growth of violent ideologies, and also "colonisation of mind" etc., are coming in the way of establishing a true Global Civil society. Gandhi believed that his notion of Global Civil Society should be grounded on the principles of peace, unity, harmony, dialogue, decentralisation, democratic practices as well as secularism.

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## **16.4 GANDHIAN CIVIL SOCIETY**

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Gandhian Civil Society is not only those which are created or established by the Gandhians, but also those which are influenced by the Gandhis' philosophy. The latter is apparent in different social movements. In other words there are two varieties of Gandhian Civil Society: Non- Governmental Organisations and Social Movements, Gandhian NGOs which form the first variety of civil society that are different from Gandhian Civil Society, particularly social movements. These NGOs believed in constructive work, believed in social transformation from below. They involved in development activity. They indeed believed in transplanting Gandhian doctrine in its entirety. Their larger goal is to create global peace. This is done by dialogue, development activities, constructive activities etc. There are thousands of such NGOs working in different parts of the world.

Most important is the second variety of civil society. Gandhian civil society is apparent not only in peace or ecology movement but also anti-globalisation movement too. In the Indian context, one of the movements which strictly followed Gandhian principle is Chipko Movement. Its main concern was to protest the deforestation in the northern India. This movement was initially led by Chandi Prasad and later on Bahuguna. Its tactics of hugging the trees can be construed as Neo-Gandhian or Post-Gandhian in nature. Such Neo or post-Gandhian tactics are apparent in Narmada Bachao Andolan particularly when they adopted Jal Samadhi. The latter was resorted to in order to resist the immersion of land due to the altering the height of Narmada Dam. Such post-Gandhian tactics are apparent in other movements as well, for example, Gav Bhandhi by the farmers' movement or resorting to destroying the property of the Multinationals by the farmers' movement as well. Even destroying the sampling of plants resorted to by the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha during 1980s is also part of Neo or post-Gandhian tactics. Interestingly many of these social movements which came to envelop political scene during 1980s openly declared their allegiance to Gandhism. Infact the ideology that the New Farmers' Movement advocated during the decade of 1980s reflected the principles of Gandhi particularly in his seminal work of Hind Swaraj. These movements definitely critiqued the western world including the western capitalism for its hegemonic character and also its ulterior design to destroy the cultural practices and the identities of social categories of the non-western world. There are others too which ultimately stood for global peace through the restructuring of social relations, international institutions etc This makes us to observe that Gandhian civil society is not necessarily confined to non-governmental organisation but also social movements. However, the Gandhian Civil Society has a long history.

### **16.4.1 Gandhian Civil Society of His Time**

Gandhi's influence on global civil society dates back to the period when Gandhi was alive

and actively engaged in nationalist struggle in India. This led to the growth of number of Gandhian Civil Society in the western world, particularly in the US and the UK. His major influence was felt in the Peace Movement of the US during 1920s. John Haynes Holmes, a prominent Unitarian reformer, and a pacifist of World War I was one of the major exponents of Gandhian Peace Ideas. As a pacifist, he serialised Gandhi's autobiography. This was followed by series of books on non-violence by Romain Rolland in 1924; by C.F. Andrews between 1930 and 1931; and Richard B. Gregg in 1934. There were others too who were influenced by the Gandhian ideas of non-violence. They include such pacifists as E. Stanley Jones, a Methodist missionary and Kirby Page. The latter was another peace activist for many years in the US. Incidentally they did support Gandhi's struggle of Salt Satyagraha.

Gandhi also influenced other civil society groups of his time in the US. They include Quakers (members of the Society of Friends who advocated peace). They incidentally had common interest in the practical side of religious experience as well as righteous rejection of violence. One of the personalities who was deeply influenced by the Gandhian ideas was Rufus Jones, noted philosopher and leader in Quaker affairs. He was the one who once remarked that "Gandhi was the greatest person now living on our planet".

Interestingly, the peace movement of 1930s had the socialist orientation and also believed in adopting non-violent methods. Incidentally the deep depression of 1920s and Hitler's growth as fascist influenced them to tilt towards socialism. However, they were all critical of Gandhian economic analysis; even some of them, particularly Reinhold Niebuhr had strong reservation about the Satyagraha, on the ground that it is a form of coercion than idealism. Despite reservations, he did argue in favour of adopting Satyagraha by the Blacks for the social justice in 1932.

During the decade of 1940s many civil society groups emerged which tried to emulate Gandhian principles. One of the groups was Committee of Racial Equality which later on became Congress of Racial Equality. This group was totally committed to non violent methods and discipline. Interestingly during the war period, a curious mixture of different groups came together with different ideological background, to look critically at the war: they included revolutionary Marxist, anarchist, Protestant activist, Quaker, American pragmatist and finally Gandhian. Such civil society existed even after the death of Gandhi

Despite the fact that Gandhi was relatively unknown in other parts of the world, he was appreciated in the Pacifist movement of Britain during his time. There were two perspectives about Gandhi: one Orientalist Hyper Difference- they were the critics of Gandhi and they portrayed Gandhi as Oriental mystic. Two, Western Over Likeness, declared Gandhi as the greatest saint in the history of mankind. They felt that his lessons personified the spirit of Christ- Satyagraha for example was a Christian thing. Interestingly, Peace Pledge Union became a hotbed of Gandhian thought; this is a pacifist organisation. This was an anti-war group established in the year 1932. They believed in non-violent resistance. However they could not achieve what Gandhi achieved, given the fact that they lacked the larger vision as that of Gandhi.

## **16.4 2 Gandhian Civil Society after Gandhi**

One of the civil societies, Gandhian Civil Society for Human Rights, came into being after the death of Gandhi in the United States. This society was established by Martin Luther King Jr in 1962 at Washington. Its main aim was to support blacks and others in the form of legal defence and aid for victims of civil rights abuses. They believed in

propagating non-violent methods and voter registration activities, and financial assistance to other organisations for civil rights. Basically it believed in non-violent struggle.

In 1948 another civil society group emerged named as Peace Makers, against conscription and tax. They adopted the strategy of tax refusal. Even many of them became part of Jim Crow movement, refusing to be recruited to the segregated military units. Interestingly, in the 1949 World Conference on Peace, emphasis was laid to open Satyagraha Units in different countries.

The Gandhian influence in the anti-war time, particularly during Iraq and Afghanistan wars in recent years is very much apparent. Peace activists from Los Angeles to Canberra were in total opposition to the US policy of attacking these countries. Many joined, which include anarchists, Marxists, even Gandhians etc to oppose war. However the protagonists of war opposed peace activists using Gandhi on the ground that Gandhi advocated collective suicide as part of convincing the enemy. They believed that such idealism of Gandhi would not work in the present context.

During this period many groups came into existence. “Gandhi-Merton Pilgrimage for Peace and Non-Violence,” came into existence on September 7-11, 2006. This coincided with the terrorist attack on World Trade Center at New York. This was enacted by Interfaith Path to Peace in the US. It observed five day 52 Km long march to draw attention to the problems of violence that the world is facing. Non-violent Peace force was another civil society groups emerged during this decade. This is an international movement aiming at resolving the conflict through dialogue. The movement had its origin in 1999 in Hague Appeal for Peace. Their other objective is to replace military peacekeeping with civil peace keeping. In other words, the growth of Gandhian civil society for the world peace is evident with large number of civil society emulating Gandhian Philosophy, techniques, and strategies. This is evident in the increasing number of civil society groups adopting Satyagraha as a mode of protest and expression.

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## **16.5 GANDHIAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND GLOBALISATION**

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Globalisation literally transformed the nature of civil society in the recent past particularly during the decade of 1990s. During this time, throughout the world, hundreds of civil society movements or what is called New Social Movements began to spread against globalisation. These anti-globalisation movements are also referred to as Global Justice movement, Anti-Corporate Movements or Alter Global movement or Anti Corporate Globalisation Movement too. They fundamentally believed that globalisation is basically meant to create spaces for global capital and also for Multinationals to appropriate natural resources, culture, lifestyles etc more than helping masses. The global economy or what is called New Economy that globalisation is introducing is nothing but “turbo-capitalism” (Edward Luttwak), “market fundamentalism” (George Soros), “casino capitalism” (Susan Strange), “cancer-stage capitalism” (John McMurtry), and as “McWorld” (Benjamin Barber). The current globalisation is called in different names: Corporate Globalisation, Globalisation from Above and so on. Further they argue that globalisation is basically anti-poor, anti-farmer, anti-women, anti-indigenous people, anti-tribal, and anti-ethnic groups. Even it has the tendency to dislocate, displace, dispossess thousands of people from their locality, cultural practices, and also from their environment. Further, it takes away the autonomy of social categories and transforms them into market dependent non-autonomous categories. Towards this end anti-globalisation movements believed in opposing the

institutions backing the globalisation such as WTO, IMF, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) etc including free trade such as North American Free Trade Agreement etc. Incidentally anti-globalisation movements are not homogenous; they include farmers' movements in India and abroad, Tribal movement against MNCs, Environmental movement, struggle of indigenous people in Latin America, etc. Some of the anti-globalisation movements include Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha in Karnataka, India; Narmada Bachao Andolan in India; The EZLN in Mexico; The Homeless Workers' Movement in Brazil; The Landless Peoples Movement in South Africa; Grassroots Global Justice in United States of America; and American Indian Movement of Latin America.

Their oppositions have been expressed in such places as Seattle, Prague, Washington DC, London, Canberra, Ottawa, Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi, Dhaka, Karachi, etc. Incidentally anti-globalisation movements also have formed international networks or collectives, thereby demonstrating that they are truly global in character and that they can cut across the boundaries of nation and nationality. Peoples' Global Action, Via Campensia and World Social Forum are some of the international Collectives or net works. These networks or collectives as well as individual social movements derived inspiration from Gandhi quite often. This is where they can be conceptualised as Gandhian Civil Society too, although there are times when they improvised Gandhian Tactics. There are anti-globalisation movements which believe in non- Gandhian ideology of radicalism. In fact anti-globalisation movements are not homogeneous in nature; they are a loose coalition of hundreds of movements as they came from different streams and also the fact that they sprang up from different cultural settings. Gandhi cannot be visualised in radical movements, particularly in Zapatistas movement of Latin America. However he is very much present in other social movements opposing globalisation.

There are many reasons why anti-Globalisation movements both in India as well as at the global level used and believed in drawing references to Gandhi. Interestingly, some of them openly declared that they should follow Gandhi without any reservations. This is apparent in the call given by the former President of India, Dr K.R. Narayanan in the World Social Forum in 2004 at Mumbai: "To fight globalization, you need to fight the way Mahatma Gandhi fought with the strength of the masses. People's power is a new factor in international politics."

One of the reasons why Gandhi became important for anti-globalisation movement is because of the fact that they fundamentally believed that global peace is not possible in the midst of current paradigm of development that the globalisation is initiated from above; this paradigm, it is argued, is anti-people, anti-poor, and anti-cultural practices and anti-communities. This is the reason why they are very comfortable with the critique that Gandhi provided in his seminal work *Hind Swaraj* about modernity, western civilisation as well as western capitalism, although they may not agree with other issues in the *Hind Swaraj*. This text of Gandhi became one of the important texts of social movements during the decade of Globalisation. This is because it had convincing answers for the globalisation on the one hand; it also provided a space for reclaiming identity to the people of grassroots, including those who have been affected by the vagaries of globalisation. Secondly, these movements believed that only Gandhian techniques of non-violence will triumph in the political agitation against global capitalism rather than violence; although they adopted Neo-Gandhian methods such as teach-in, taking out Caravan, etc. Thirdly, they believed that the Gandhian concept of Swadeshi can be used as an alternative to the present day paradigm of development mediating through global capitalist

economy. Gandhis' concept of community empowerment through grass root action was also looked upon as best solution. This is where they advocated the bottom up approach than top down approach by empowering the people. They fundamentally believed in non-violent civil disobedience movement of Gandhi. They argue that Civil Disobedience should be used as a tool for social change and for global peace in three ways: one, educating uninformed people; make the policy makers to understand the cost of violence mediating through war, capitalism, and uneven development etc; and three, creating solidarity network among the social movements.

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## 16.6 CHALLENGES TO GLOBAL PEACE

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The present day world is known as globalised world in the sense that it has integrated different societies, conscripted time and space, and has created borderless world. At the same time, the globalised world has created more spaces for violence in different forms such as communal, caste, regional, intra state, interstate etc. Globalised world is not free from conflict, discrimination, contradictions, etc. The stockpiling of nuclear weapons, increasing division among rich and poor, increasing gap between developed and developing world all have contributed towards conflicts.

The global peace is slow but steadily becoming fragile- we are living in a situation of "disturbed peace" or "suspended peace". This is obvious if we look at the Global Peace Index. This index is an attempt to understand the relative peacefulness of the nations as well as the disturbances across the countries. It is strange that the Peaceful countries are those which are known for good governance. Peace Index gives the picture that New Zealand topped the Peace Index followed by Iceland and Japan. Interestingly the US stood at 85<sup>th</sup> place and India in 128. The last three places went to Bangladesh, Somalia and Iraq.

There is large number of issues afflicting global peace. War is not the only reason to understand the growing conflict, but growing poverty, hunger, malnutrition, homeless, ecological degradation, appropriation of natural resources, cultural displacement, etc. It is estimated that in the year 2010 itself, the number of people who are reeling under hunger will cross 925 million. The highest number is found in Asia and Pacific region with 578 million, followed by sub-Saharan Africa (239 million), Latin and Caribbean countries (53 million), Near East and North Africa (37 million). Even the developed world is not free from hunger (19 million). In the midst of increasing hunger, peace is becoming a difficult proposition.

It is true that hunger is related to poverty. In fact the increasing poverty is one of the major causes for the disturbed peace throughout the world (Vandana Shiva, 2006). It is argued that "The number of people living in extreme poverty [may have fallen from] 1.9 billion to 1.4 billion people between 1981 and 2005, however, if China is taken out of the calculation, this number actually increased from 1.1 billion people to 1.2 billion people." In addition, it is observed that in several countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Northern Africa and Central Asia, the actual poverty level had increased during 1981 and 2005. World Bank has estimated that there are nearly 1,345 million poor people in developing world living on 1/25 dollar a day.

Corollary to the previous argument, the increasing crisis in the realm of food or hunger, urban space, cleaner water, and environment also adds to disturbed peace at the global level. The recent food riots (*Peter Krauth, 2010*) in Bangladesh, Pakistan Haiti,

Mozambique, Egypt, and some parts of India particularly in West Bengal reflects the growing food crisis; although food riots have come down, they may resurface at any point of time. In fact, in 2008 the UN's World Food Programme had warned of a "silent Tsunami" in the realm of hunger sweeping different parts of the world because of inflated or soaring prices, "it was a warning that the world's poor were being squeezed as increasingly higher portions of their family incomes were being spent on the food they required for their very survival" (*Peter Krauth, 2010*).

*Further one cannot overlook the increasing disparity between the rich on the one hand and the poor on the other. The globalisation, in fact, more than becoming "panacea" has accentuated the disparity as well as differences. It is estimated that in the year 2000, one per cent of the super rich were controlling 40 per cent of the global asset. Similarly ten per cent of the global rich were controlling 85 per cent total assets during the same period; it is a paradox that "the richest 10 percent of the world's population's income is roughly 117 times higher than the poorest 10 percent". Such increasing gap has larger effect on the politics: the series of conflicts would translate into political riots.*

*It is estimated that in 2006 alone more than 36 million died of hunger, mainly due to malnutrition. The UN Special Rapporteur on Right to Food, in his report, argued that in the year 2006, mortality due to malnutrition accounted for 58% of the total mortality. In India alone there are 217 million populations, as per the FAO estimate, living as "undernourished". Similar is the case of increase in the homeless in 2005. It was estimated that 100 million people around the world were homeless people. At the same time nearly 884 million people are deprived of safe drinking water. Such global trend definitely goes against creating everlasting global peace.*

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## **16.7 GANDHIAN CIVIL SOCIETY: AN ANSWER FOR GLOBAL PEACE**

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This shows that there is no single Gandhi. In fact the eminent scholar Ashish Nandy argued that there are four kinds of Gandhi: Gandhi of the Indian state and Indian nationalism; Gandhi of the Gandhians; Gandhi of the ragamuffins, eccentrics and the unpredictable; and lastly, Mythic Gandhi. In the latter case, Gandhi became a symbol of non-violence, a symbol of resistance against tyrants or authoritarian regimes; he became the symbol of world change and finally global peace. To quote Ashish Nandy,

"When the Polish workers rose against their authoritarian regime in the late 1980s, they talked of Lech Walesa as their Gandhi, a description the Vodka-guzzling, tough speaking, trade union leader must have found difficult to swallow. But the Polish labourers were not interested in the historical, verifiable similarities or dissimilarities between the two; they were making a different statement. They were saying something about what they themselves wanted and about how Gandhi, with his weapon of militant non-violence, had become in our time a symbol of defiance of hollow tyrants and bureaucratic authoritarianism backed by the power of the state and modern technology. For above all, this Gandhi is a symbol of those struggling against injustice, while trying to retain their humanity even when faced with unqualified inhumanity. That is why when Benito Aquino of Philippines was assassinated, the demonstrators on the streets of Manila did exactly what the Polish labourers at Gdansk did. They shouted 'Benito, our Gandhi,' and if this seems only a coincidence, the Burmese students who rose against their military regime some years ago



also invoked Gandhi in the same way. Only their leader this time was Aung San Suu Kyi, who had not read Gandhi when she began to be thoughtlessly accused of being an uncompromising Gandhian. At different times, this epithet fit different people from Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan to Nelson Mandela”. Gandhi is fast becoming messiah of masses of the world and the global peace. He is also becoming an answer to the vagaries of globalisation.

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## 16.8 SUMMARY

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The Gandhian Civil Society is the product of three important factors in the history: anti-colonial struggle, western civilisation and anti-globalisation. There are two genres of Gandhian Civil Society one can visualise: one, Gandhian NGOs who works to bring ever lasting global peace through constructive work; and two, Social Movements- the latter are more vibrant, more powerful in terms of addressing the issues at the global level. However, Gandhi too had the vision of a Civil Society which believed in dialogue, discussion, absence of conflict, unity, etc. His notion of civil society as a critique of western civil society reflected in his seminal work, *Hind Swaraj*. Nonetheless, during his life time itself, many Civil Societies which believed in his principles of global peace emerged particularly in the US and the UK. This trend continued even after his death. The recent decade of globalisation saw the growth of hundreds of civil societies upholding and accepting Gandhi for three important reasons: firstly, his critique of western modernity mediating through his seminal work as well as nationalist movement suiting the present day social movements; secondly, his strategy of non-violence has more currency than violent actions and finally his notion of alternative economy is becoming an answer to the “New Economy” as well as paradigm of development initiated by globalisation.

Nonetheless, one should not overlook the fact that at present we are witnessing a situation of “disturbed peace”. This is not only due to war and ethnic crisis but also due to the prevalence of hunger, poverty, uneven development, unequal distribution of income and the growing disparity. Given the fact that Gandhi is becoming the messiah of social movements, and the marginalised masses, he will certainly be an answer to the global peace and the development.

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## 16.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss Gandhi’s notion of Civil Society.
2. Analyse the Gandhian Civil Society of his time.
3. Evaluate the post-Gandhian Civil Society.
4. Critically analyse anti-globalisation movements.

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