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ECONOMIC DISPARITY - A PHILOSOPHIC RESPONSE

Man is a being unto himself. A human person is a project in the process of making himself or herself. Since man is a being-in-the-world, he has a responsibility to the whole world especially to all the human beings. Ours is a 'we-existence', a pro-existence (an existence for others). We complete our communitarian existence in the process of creating more just and human structures. The more just our structures are, the more human they become, and they help the human beings to reach that state of growth in which there is an experience of existing-for-one-another. The process of humanisation calls for the end of those structures which promotes dehumanisation. In the world of daily experience men are made use of for purposes which hardly befits them as human beings. In this paper our effort will be to analyze the proper response of philosophers towards economic inequality.

1. Man as Being of Justice

Man, being *Mit-dasein*, has no other option but to take into account the fact of being-with-others. In the process of living together there is the possibility of approaching the other with two attitudes – an attitude of acceptance or of rejection. In the attitude of acceptance the other is not seen as menacing threat, or as a means for me to grow, but as a person, a co-existent thou, a presence. Hence the other becomes one of value. I do not see him/her as a 'hell', but as a 'hello'. The other becomes a question for me to challenge me to a new existence, with him I become capable of creating a group of solidarity and commitment and together we create a community where justice reigns. Acceptance becomes the cornerstone of such a community. This acceptance is based on justice. A person grows out of this justice and flowers into fulness through this justice. In this encounter with the other he/she can make me to realize how deficient I am in offering or rendering justice for the other's growth. Either I

become an open-ended person having the capacity to accept and respond to the other, or I become 'windowless monad' with no possibility of intercourse with the other. In the latter case I become a selfish person with no willingness to acknowledge the other's presence, and I fail to evoke in him a movement towards the fullness of personhood, and this is a denial of justice.

Since man is a being-unto-justice man has to realize his call and fulfil this great task of his by making the other realize his unique possibilities as man. Then he will have realized his call as a being-of-justice.

2. Man as a Being Towards Justice - Transformative Justice

Man is not only being-of-justice; he is also a person moving 'towards' justice, in the sense that justice is a process and growing in justice is a must for man's personality. Man can never reach the fullness of justice, since the very concept of justice is a dynamic one. There is no one form of justice which is valid for all times. As man grows in his self-understanding and understanding of the others, especially in the awareness of need for justice, he moves towards a more perfect form of justice. This process is continuous and never ending one. It is in this sense that we have to understand man as a being-towards-justice. Man grows through rendering justice and receiving justice. Man's striving for justice can reach a finality only with the last man on earth; until then he will grow towards that justice which gives him fulfilment as a human person.

Justice is an ethical concept. Since man is a moral being, justice will always have reference to morality. Justice is usually understood as 'rendering each one his/her due'. But this is a bare minimum justice needed for a human being to exist. This is usually called the commutative justice.

A human being is not a mere living being having a few needs. Being a person, the human being stands in need of justice which will help the individual to be a free person and to grow to that fulfilment as a human person. The justice that which helps a person to grow to his full maturity is called *Transformative* or *Creative* justice, (Paul Tillich). This is most needed for a human person. When transformative justice is denied to human beings they do not

grow to the full stature of their personality. The criterion of creative justice is *fulfilment*: Only when human beings have achieved their highest growth as persons then will justice be fully established.

Justice, power and love are intimately related. Justice is immanent in power and love. Justice is the form of power in which the power of being actualizes itself in the encounter of power with power. If a totalitarian state dehumanizes the people through its laws, then the intrinsic claim of justice for the people is denied. The exercise of authority should be in justice. If it does not happen, protest against authority is justified even if it is the most hallowed form of authority.

Just as in power justice is immanent, so also in love. If love does not include justice, it is chaotic self-surrender. Love is not superior to justice, and they cannot exist separately. Love does not do more than justice demands, but love is the ultimate principle of justice. Not only in personal encounter, but in the encounter of social groups too we find a play of power, justice and love. No ethnic, political or religious group has power to oppress, or to make use of them for their own ends. The relationship should be in justice which is the form of power and love.

In order to understand economic inequality better, we should see man also as possessing some rights. "Right" means to be entitled to do or possess something. Although men have several rights, only a few have the backing of law; in other terms only a few rights can be enforced by law. All the rights have a normative character, they ought to be realized, even though not all of them are enforced by law. To accept and respect the rights of another is demand of justice. Both right and justice refer to the community of persons. Right implies a relationship of a subject to subject, intersubjectivity. Justice is mode of co-existence, a mode of accompanying the other. Social justice is a justice of the community or common welfare.

All the rights of man are centred on the basic one, namely, the right to live as a human person. The safeguarding of this basic human right is demanded by social justice. Social justice, as Bernard Häring says, imposes the obligation of assisting those in need, in

so far as it may be necessary to enable them to live in a manner, worthy of human beings. Just as to live as the human person is the basic right of every man, to let others live as human persons is the basic *ought* or responsibility of every man. This responsibility is placed on me from two angles: first, it comes to me from the fact of everybody having the right to *exist totally*. Every right has a corresponding 'ought'. Secondly, this basic *ought* is placed on me by my own existence. I exist only insofar as I let others exist.

When we say 'to let others exist' it does not mean merely allowing others to live by not disturbing them, but it demands from everyone a positive contribution towards others' total existence. I am guilty insofar as I fail to do this. A person is guilty because he/she causes a 'lack' in the existence of another. I am guilty when I am unwilling to share my belongings (my house, my food, my money, etc.). 'To have' entails a responsibility towards the 'have-nots'. I let others exist totally the moment I am willing to share what I 'have' and what I *am*. My world is not exclusively *my* world but *our* world, for being-in-the world is a being-with-others. The 'have nots' have a natural right to get a share from the accumulated wealth of the 'haves'. No person has an absolute right or monopoly over anything. The world and its resources are meant for all men. The right to possess is not an absolute right but a relative one, and if the right to possess deprives another of his basic right to existence, then the so-called right of mine is an unjust one; and it is a social evil.

Man is both possibility and freedom, and man chooses what he wants to be. This is only one aspect of man; it cannot be separated from the other aspect: facticity. Man is not only what he has become, but what he has already been. Facticity refers to this abandonment or thrownness of man. I am thrown into a particular environmental and communal situation, which is not of my choice. My possibility is rooted in my facticity. It is none of my fault that I am born in a poor family with minimal convenience and facilities to grow, and it is not the merit of another to find himself/herself in a rich family with a conducive environment to grow up in the society. It appears meaningless to speak about the possibility to work and earn when I have no property to work at, no qualifications to get jobs, no means to get qualified, or if

qualified, no recommendation from the powerful and influential to get a job. Who is responsible for all these? As Paul Ricoeur says 'one's freedom to live a decent human life is curtailed by one's nature'.

3. Economy as the Basis of Man's Practical Life

Man is an economic being. Most of his activities are controlled by the economy. Marx understood this and analysed man's relationships in terms of economic transactions. For him there are only two groups of people – the owners of the means of production and the work force (workers). Though his analysis may be one-sided, there is a lot of truth in it. Man is very much bound and controlled by economic relationships. In his dealings with others man measures practically everything in terms of money. Marx called charity as organised hypocrisy. During the industrial revolution a few rich (bourgeoisie) possessed all the factories (or means of production) and made use of the vast mass of the proletariat to make enormous profit. After having sucked their life-blood, a few capitalists and clergymen used to arrange some sort of works of charity for the poor. These were organized hypocrisy according to Marx, for they were giving only a portion of the 'stolen fruit' and expect the victims to be grateful. The call to love and help others is a demand of justice. When we apply it to the economy, we find that man is a being who acts on praxis which has an economic basis, and without which it is almost impossible for man to survive. The economy has invaded every sphere of man's life, and it is both his boon and bane. Life has become impossible without money, and money brings man power and authority; he has made it a powerful weapon. We have just only to look at the present economic situation. America dictates terms to all the countries in the world because it is the only super power in the world both economically and militarily. They dictate terms to the developing and underdeveloped countries. A few years back five roubles were equal to one U.S dollar. Last year in August-September it stood at 1040 roubles to a dollar. In Ukraine, the situation was still worse, and almost unimaginable. Their currency (kypon) stood at 8300 for one U.S. dollar. One can imagine the growth a country can achieve in such circumstances. The life of the people become as stifled that they perceive no future for their country as a people. A prosperous economy based on mutual respect of persons is a must for the all-round growth of a nation.

4. Economic Disparity Hindering the Growth of the Human Person

The situation paper has tried to delineate economic disparity, especially as it exists in India. The global situation too is not very different. The so called 'first world' enjoys the benefits of the labour of the Second and Third worlds. They have no shame to do so, and still worse they appear to be the benefactors of the developing and underdeveloped world. Through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund they hold these nations as slaves of their economy. The terms of the contract are dictated by them, and opposite parties to the contract are forced to submission and they have no option left except to surrender for the sake of survival. The GATT signed by India is a glaring example of the same. How our beloved country has been made a ransom for such manipulated economy of the U.S.A. and other countries. We are all bewitched and fooled by the beautiful terminology of the 'New Economy'. Unless and until there is some parity in economy there will be disparity in relationships and hence disparity in growth.

The 'haves' usually claim that they made use of the opportunities while the 'have-nots' did not care to use them; hence they themselves are responsible for their poverty and misery. The argument may look sound on the face of it. Man being a conditioned being is restricted in various ways. The 'haves' deprive the 'have-nots' of their opportunities, and being in a superior position they are able to manipulate the resources for their own betterment.

As the economic disparity widens, the growth of the people under pressure will be hindered. In order to help the others exist totally and fully, I am bound to contribute positively. It is not enough that I do not steal his property and thus cause him a deprivation, but I must see that he is in a situation in which he can attain the total growth of the person. In this holistic growth economy plays a vital role. No one should be deprived of his basic needs, and no one should accumulate wealth in such a way as to deprive his neighbour of the basic needs of life as a human being. As Marx holds, the accumulated wealth is the portion of my neighbour which I have unjustly got hold of. The stark reality today is that millions go to bed with their stomachs empty, but at the same time thousands feed themselves and revel in drinks in the posh hotels of India and

abroad. The money they spend per day will be enough for an ordinary family for one year. Recently the luxury liner Queen Elizabeth II made a trip round the world affording its holiday makers the most exotic things and sceneries in the world. The expense per day was 33,000 rupees. In such a contrasting situations, how can the vast majority of people who are economically poor attain to the growth of their normal human personality?

5. Our Role in Rendering Justice to the 'Justice-denied'

A question may be asked, is it our task to fight for justice and bring about a fair equality? Often we forget the fact that the oppressors employ a philosophy to continue their oppression. They build their philosophy on the notion of freedom and right. These are the myths that need to be exploded. Even persons like Sartre and Camus who advocated total freedom of man admitted that the freedom of man is 'bound' by various factors. One such important factor is the 'fellowman'. Men form a seriality, a group and a community. These force men to various types of behaviour. The resources are so limited that men are bound to exploit one another. When it comes to wealth, human beings forget all their loyalty and humanity.

It is a Philosopher's role to point out the human oppression that goes on, and elucidate clearly the terms on which human society should be built up. Philosophy has been seen as an arm chair exercise of those who have plenty of time at their disposal and who are not worried about the huzzles and buzzles of the day, whose three meals have been assured and who live in an ivory tower of intellectual fancy. It is high time that such a notion of philosophy be changed. Like theology, philosophy should be born out of the experiences of people. Philosophy should have a relevance to the daily life of the people and it should become a constant questioner and challenge to the existing situations of disparity and oppression. One of the Mexican philosophers who participated in the World Congress of Philosophy, Moscow (1993) told the philosophers of the first world that their terminologies have no relevance for his people because the philosophy that they advocate is far removed from the experiences of his people. Hence a philosophy which can understand the needs of the people, a philosophy which can articulate such needs is what is imperative. Philosophy's role is to

become the voice of the voiceless, to make efforts to render justice to the justice-denied. How to work out the strategies of such a philosophy is worth reflecting upon.

6. Our Role in the Third world

We who belong to the third world should ask what our role is in bringing about justice in the oppressive situations and how we can fight the inequality of the economy. Today's need is a philosophy of social change. We cannot withdraw in to our shells and pretend that everything is alright; we have to become a responding community to the glaring inequalities of the day. We can not escape in to the world of the mayavadins and pretend that reality is different from what exists. We are infected with the ideology of preservation and permanence which is past-oriented. We need a philosophy which is rooted in the present and is able to look forward to the future with hope. We need a revolutionary philosophy which can challenge the existing situation. If our philosophy remains silent in the face of oppression, injustice, hatred, disunity, communalism, etc., we become a part of that structure which has brought about such a situation. A revolutionary philosophy has to denounce the existing unjust structures which deprive man of his freedom and hinder his growth and announce structures which are capable of ushering in a society of justice, in the biblical terminology, the Kingdom of God. Philosophers will have to take a prophetic stance against the dehumanizing situation and every sacralisation of oppressive structures.

All around we see the vicious circle of poverty on the economic dimension, the vicious circle of force on the political dimension, the vicious circle of racial, gender and cultural alienation, the vicious circle of industrial pollution of nature and vicious circle of senselessness and God-forsakenness; and the question is how these can be overcome. These can be overcome in a society of true democracy where the equal rights of man and woman are recognised, where poverty can be overcome by sharing the goods of the world, where justice is rendered to everyone. Very often in the name of order and law we justify the violation of human rights and we build up a philosophy to protect it. But as Paul Lehmann has pointed out "freedom is the presupposition and condition of the order; order is not the presupposition and condition of the freedom; justice is the foundation

and criterion of law; law is not the foundation and criterion of justice”.

In the appalling economic situation of India today, what should be the response of Indian philosophers? Have we a task and responsibility? Are we to take refuge in the philosophy of the past and say that this existence is *anitya* and all is *maya*? Shall we escape to an island where these situations do not exist? As Albert Camus has pointed out in his book *The Plague*, “we must convince ourselves that there is no island of escape in a time of plague’. We cannot advocate a spirituality of disdain of our human personality. The plague as painted by Camus is an imaginary situation, but such situations are of common occurrence for us. The plague in Surat and other parts of the country, as well as natural calamities challenge the consciousness of all of us. It is precisely on these occasions that the anti-social elements take advantage of the situation. We get a graphic description of it in *The Plague*: “Meanwhile the authorities had another cause for anxiety in the difficulty of maintaining food-supply, profiteers were taking a hand and purveying at enormous prices essential foodstuffs not available in the shops. The result was that the poor families were in great straits, while the rich went short of practically nothing. Thus, whereas the plague by its impartial ministrations should have promoted equality amongst our town folk, it now had the opposite effect and, thanks to the habitual conflict of cupidities, exacerbated the sense of injustice ranking in man’s hearts....”

The Indian economic situation calls a radical response from us. Are we willing to respond, or shall we remain reactionaries? We know how our Rajas and Maharajas in the past enjoyed themselves at the expense of the poor people of their kingdom. The divine right of a king to enjoy at the expense of the others was not questioned. We get a rather good and brief presentation of some of our kings before Independence in the book: *Freedom at Midnight*. Even after the Independence, the situation has not changed much. As the situation paper has presented, more than 60% of the people of India still remain poor. We may boast of many achievements as an independent nation. Though we may be free from foreign oppression the vast majority of our people still remain unfree economically, politically and culturally. When will the millions of poor in India have enough food to eat, and have a roof over their heads? In

the corrupt political situation of today we need to become a prophetic voice which can challenge the situation and call for a meaningful and human growth-centred economy.

7. Conclusion

In this paper my endeavour was to point out a philosophy of social justice which should aim at the levelling of economic inequalities. Karl Marx aimed at a building up of a philosophy based on economy and credit should be given to him for showing forth the glaring inequalities that existed in the situation after the industrial revolution and for challenging the situation and calling for a new society established in justice and comradeship. As the situation paper has pointed out, the alienation of the poor will continue if the elite and educated people of India remain passive, silent and indifferent to the inequalities and sufferings of the poor. The poor themselves have to be empowered and educated for working out their own liberation. For any revolution to be effective what is essential is a strategy, in other terms, a philosophy of action. The basic awareness of the people about their oppressive situation, how these have been brought about and how they can be changed through a participatory mode of struggle will lead them to liberation. In this struggle they should feel the need to become the messiahs of liberation to their own fellowmen who are oppressed. Philosophers, I feel, can play the role of strategy planners and give the needed intellectual input necessary for a revolution towards an egalitarian society - a society of freedom and justice.