

REPAIRER OF THE BREACH: ECONOMICS

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Introduction

Economics is the branch of knowledge concerned with the production, consumption, and transfer of wealth. The Wikipedia defines Economics as *the social science that studies economic activity to gain an understanding of the processes that govern the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services in an exchange economy.*¹ We cannot hide the fact that we are living in a world where economic injustice is rampant everywhere. Our country, India, has a very charming Preamble in the Constitution which says:

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.²

If we carefully reclaim the vision of our constitutional makers, we can see that securing economic justice for all the citizens is enshrined in our constitution. But in reality, we can see the differences of the haves and the have-nots and how the gaps between the rich and the poor could affect our community lives. Because of the present economic trend under Privatization and Globalization paradigm of economy, Billionaires are increasing day by day, at the same time people in Below Poverty Line are increasing day by day. Very few people are enjoying a big amount of wealth whereas many people are in need of even basic necessities.

The questions arise like: Who maintain economic resources and who control the production? Is there any equal distribution among the people? Who consumes the wealth of the land? Is the way how we transfer the wealth fair enough? Etc. This economic injustice hampers the life of equality in our society as a whole, and destroys the atmosphere of love and integrity in the church in particular, as it makes a crack among the members. These breaches really need to be repaired.

Is God Justice?

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economics> (as on 1st September, 2014)

² www.constitution.org/cons/india/preamble.html (as on 1st September, 2014)

God is a God of Justice. God is against any form of manipulation and exploitation. He favors not someone nor neglects the other. He did not allow His chosen people the Israelites to show partiality to a poor man in dispute, nor - to pervert justice, to oppress a stranger, to cheat or rob one's neighbor, and to take a bribe (Exod. 23:3; Lev. 19:13; Deut. 16:19). He even provided some rules concerning the distribution of the fruit of the land for the poor, widows and strangers in order that they might have a share from the economic resources and something to eat.³

God sent the prophets to raise their voices for the voiceless people in the context of economic exploitation. They defended the helpless poor and risked their lives for the liberation of the oppressed. They strongly criticized the affluent who indulged themselves in luxury without caring the plight of their poor neighbours. The prophet's criticism of luxurious life styles of the rich was often related to the situation in which the traditional value of sharing was being undermined. The partying, banqueting and feasting culture of the wealthy people was for the prophet a clear manifestation of their negligence of the principle of sharing in society. They stood up for the cause of the uprooted people who were being alienated from ancestral land as a result of economic development. The God in the Old Testament is still our God today, He still demands justice in the distribution of wealth of the land. And He still expects us to live justly and fairly according to our possessions.

What about Economic Justice in Our Present World?

Let us see a quick glance of our present world's economic paradigm. One of the most important issues on economic justice is who won and control economic resources? God has provided us many natural resources such as land, forest, water, mineral resources and so on. There are to be commons of all the people. Ecclesiastes 5:9 says: "*Moreover the profit of the land is for all, even the king is served from the field.*" It is clear that God wants us to share the economic resources by everyone, irrespective of race, class, status, etc. But these resources are privatized and controlled by a few rich people. The rich and powerful people hungrily grabbing land and thus a few rich people hold large area of land therefore many people are landless having no economic base. Water resources have also been privatized and we have to buy even water which God gives us. Likewise, forest, mineral resources, etc. are at the hand of a few elite so that for common people it is very difficult to make a move for economic improvement without basic resources.

Now, let us see about the production and the beneficiaries. Today, there is intense craving for development as economic globalization has created an unprecedented excitement about development among all sections of the people. We often equate modernization in the form of new gadgets, latest fashions, new car models, expressed highways, flyovers, modern airports, big shopping malls, civic amenities etc. with development. But we need to note that the model of

³ When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 19:9-10, NKJV). See also Duet. 24:19-22.

development we are following is benefited mainly by the industrialists, the technocrats and the power elites whereas the people in the margins are more and more suffering under the development paradigm. Big dams and big industries may generate economic benefits at the same time incur social cost as they displace thousands of people from their life and livelihood. Modern economic and developmental enterprise may create new employment opportunities to a few high salaries professionals but at the expense of destitutions, homelessness, bankruptcy, and alienation of many. We must be critical for the developmental models and paradigm considering whether it promotes economic justice for all or it is beneficial for few but destructive for many.

In the process of distribution also, there are many unfair means. The said modernization stirred the thinking of people to get the latest developed materials, since they promote the idea that *you are what you eat, wear, and possess*, rather than *what you do and sacrifice for the well-being of the fellow human beings*. The accumulation of financial assets is now the absolute, immutable yardstick for all economic, social, and political decisions, whereas social service and the economic well-being of the global community are largely neglected. People tend to treat one another as commodities and those who lack money and possessions are often treated as people without any value or importance. The money-driven value system emerges triumphant in the present global community. This made the people to do any unfair means in order to get what they want. For example, when the government is implementing to build some Hydel or dam project, people who never own a land in that area will make urgent LSC for getting the compensation. We may have come across the way how some few elite people divert funds and budgets coming from the central government, this made the rampant practice of bribery, cheating, corruption, and favoritism. The unprivileged people are exploited in this way by the few authorized people.

How Globalization, Materialism and Consumerism Affect the Church

If we look Acts 2: 44-45⁴, we see that the members of the first church share together everything, there was no distinction among them. They helped each other and praise God together. There was consent in their services because the status of the congregation seemed to be of same level. We can imagine that they wore the same dresses, talked about the alike topics, and enjoyed the comparable advantages.

Nowadays, we are being intruded by the so called Globalization⁵ and we are living in a ‘*glocal*’ context where global and local are intertwined. We can easily see, communicate and access the people around the world in no time; we can sell and buy from our bedroom through internet marketing. We tend to live as the other culture live, have what they have, and eat what they eat.

⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need (NKJV).

⁵ Globalization is the process of integration across world-space arising from the interchange of world views, products, ideas, and other aspects of culture. Advances in transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, including the rise of the telegraph and its posterity the Internet, are major factors in globalization, generating further interdependence of economic and cultural activities. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globalization> (12.08.2014)

It creates a heart of envying other people and their possessions. We want to have the latest products of the Multinational Companies. This brings about a division in the congregation, because some members give too much importance to material possessions rather than to spiritual or intellectual things which is called 'materialism.' They believe that physical well-being and worldly possessions constitute the greatest good and highest value in life.

Another factor which made the breach among the congregation is consumerism which is effected by materialism. It is a social and economic order and ideology that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-greater amounts. Consumerism causes a materialistic belief that the more materials acquired the better, implying an increased value placed on material possessions.⁶ We live in a society that promotes materialism and consumerism. We envy our neighbours and we want to have what other people have even we do not afford them. People are buying what they want or desire, not what they need.

Most of our youth in the church today are driven mad by the lifestyle created by globalization forces. They are very conscious about their figure and beauty. Many of us are crazy about what is advertised as fashion. When the new model of electronic gadgets and fashion are coming up, they want to have the latest one, not because they need them, but because they want to be a person who owns that latest model. They think that the honour and respect lie on possession of materials with a high price. They are conscious of the price, not the reliability or helpful of the things, they become a price tag person. Even in the church services, many people try to show off their new designed fashion, they only try to catch the eyes of others. These bring a fake life and a nominal Christians. We think only ourselves, we become self-centered persons. We say 'its ok' if we can get what we want, we seldom care for the feelings of the others.

In some churches, there are some biases in distribution of privileges among the members. The ones who give and donate more for the church are likely to have more privileges in the Church services than those who contribute fewer amounts. In many churches we list out the order of the tithe payer in descending order and announce to the people. This may create some hesitant for the poor people in the church, or it may bring an unnecessary race against the higher amount payers to be the top. Many of our churches are becoming conscious of the look of the building and the accessories in the building. Of course, we are to grow into maturity in every way, I do not object this, if we have enough fund to do so. But many churches pay their attention first to the outside look of the church while neglecting the welfare of the congregation and the ministry for the Lord.

How to become a Repairer of this Economic Breach

In this globalized world of materialism, where economic injustice is prevalent and where there is a wide breach among the community, a big question lies before us, which we cannot go away without answering it. The question is: In this situation, what alternative values should we

⁶ <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/consumerism.asp> (12.08.2014).

promote as Apostolic Church? It is important to cultivate a people-oriented one, an others-centered worldview rather than one which is self-centered. Like the first Apostolic Church, who shared what they have, we need to develop the values of human relationships, social service, and solidarity with fellow human beings - especially for the weak and neglected ones - should be strongly held and propagated by the Church in the present global context. We have also seen that the prophets boldly challenged the greed people who valued wealth and possessions more than their fellow human beings, as they wanted to offer people-oriented values, such as selfless service, generosity, hospitality, communitarian relationships and love for others.

Let us remember even our Lord Jesus Christ never lived expensively. He even did not allow his disciples to live expensively in their ministry.⁷ When we go to church with expensive fashions, we may expel someone who could not afford expensive ones from the church. We must live as simple as and as average as we could. As a follower of Christ, we must live humbly and we must be satisfied with what we got from God. We need to preach that the richness and wealth do not lie in the materials and gadgets we possess, but in the inclination of our heart. And the beauty does not lie in the fashions, makeup and accessories we wear, but in our characters. So, we must try to be contented in our belongings, we must show other people our true beauty which is not depend on the latest fashion or developed materials. Paul also said that he knew how to be contented in whatsoever position he might be.⁸ We must buy what we need, not what we want. We must teach other to live according to one's income. We must not long for the worldly riches, fame or allurements, rather we must seek how to share and live with others without greed and jealousy.

⁷ In Matthew 10:9-10, Jesus said, "Provide neither gold nor silver, nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food" (NKJV).

⁸ In his letter to the Philippians, he said, "...for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to be abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:11-12, NKJV).