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Economics of Need and Economics of Want: A Distinction Essential: Prof. Barlingay's account.

Introduction

This research paper attempts to get pragmatic way to deal with few questions like, 'Will Indian Economic thoughts be able to give directions to crises-ridden global economic system?', 'Can India show solutions to the World's Present Socio-economical crises?' and 'What are the Alternatives available before mankind to avoid economic crises?'

The concept of economic exploitation or “exploitation” which has been the focal point of solemn philosophical debate is one of the favorite nouns in the glossary of critics of the free market economy. The strongest version of the claim that the free market necessarily involves exploitation is that of Karl Marx.

The aim of this research paper is to bring to the notice of economist, policy makers, research scholars, professors and students of economics as well as of philosophy and layman, that what kind of solution, a Philosopher from India, like Prof. Surendra S. Barlingay¹ has to offer to the discipline of economics at large.

Want, Need, and Satisfaction

Prof. Barlingay distinguished between economics of want and economics of need. He shows, it is the economics of wants which gives rise to exploitation. He discusses the problems with reference to the concepts like want, need, and satisfaction. Many a time, these concepts are used as if they were synonymous, but are not so as they are understood today. These term connote and denote different

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surendra_Sheodas_Barlingay

types of social set ups. He emphasizes on need based economy to minimize the exploitation of either in open form or disguise for. He advocates Gandhian economy as solution to given crises in economy today.

The term 'need' is used in the sense of necessity of the given situation. The doctors, e.g., may say that a patient's body needs certain balanced food, that it needs some calories, proteins etc. Need, then, is concerned on one side, with requirements of the organism and on the other side, with the objects required. (1983,19)

Here we compare 'need' with 'knowledge'. Just as knowledge has some kind of objectivity and therefore necessity, 'need' also has a necessity based on its relationship with the object. Off course, there is basic difference between 'knowledge' and 'need'. It is this, that, 'knowledge' implies the existence of its object, whereas need does not.

Let us explain this with reference to the concept of want. Just as the word 'need', 'behaves' like the word 'know', similarly the word 'want' 'behaves' like the word 'feel' or 'believe'. For example, when someone feels that there is something, the existence of the object at that or any other time is not ensured. If someone wants a *GulBakavali* or flower of *Bakavali*, it does not follow that there is the flower of *Bakavali*. Here a question can be raised with reference to 'need' also. The object of 'need' may not exist at that time, and with reference to 'want' also is the same case. Where remains the difference then?

Two parameters: subjectivity- objectivity and freedom

Prof. Barlingay suggests two parameters for the differentiation(1983,19-22). The first one is in terms of *subjectivity- objectivity* and the other is in terms of *freedom*. In the case of need we can say that it has a kind of objectivity in the sense that whether the person 'likes' or 'desires' something or not, if it is an object of his need then he *must* have it. This 'must' indicate necessity or objectivity. Secondly, a person is not 'free' in needing or not needing something. As against this, "The word, want has its emphasis on the subjective side, one can certainly use the word, want, without there being anything to which the word 'want' refers. If a person who 'wants' , is free, he can imagine anything by way of want. It is this 'freedom' of man which

gives rise to the possibility of infinite wants. Here, we should take note of the fact that man's needs can increase but they cannot increase beyond a certain proportion.

Let us examine the notion of 'satisfaction' in relation to 'wants' and 'needs'. Prof. Barlingay observes that, the use of the words, 'want' and 'satisfaction' lead us to a very important corollary: it is this : man's wants can never be satisfied. Satisfaction of the one want would lead to another want and satisfaction of that want would lead to a third want and finally a stage would come when there would at least be one want, which would be dissatisfied, however great our resources may be.

But satisfaction of need would behave altogether in a different way. It would of course, depend on the availability of resources. But with sufficient resources it should be possible to satisfy our needs.

Role of the concept of Want

According to Prof. Barlingay 'want' as a subjective notion can play a constructive as well as destructive role. At constructive level it can give rise to new discoveries. Through untiring efforts man can try to bring imaginary objects of want into actuality. At destructive level, wants can give rise to exploitation. This is the 'logic of exploitation'(1983,24) and he explains in this fashion; "Corresponding to my wants, there must also be the wants of others. If I (any 'I') am to sell my commodities to others, others must need them , then it will be necessary to create a feeling in them that they 'really want' them, that without them their life would not be civilized or would rather be miserable. That is, in order for getting my wants satisfied, I must be able to create in other's corresponding wants for my commodities. This is building out markets or finding out markets. Sometimes, political power can be utilized for creating such markets. In order to give protection to some particular kind of goods, it may be possible to increase duties on some other goods and make it impossible for the purchaser to buy any other goods except our own. If our proposition is that wants are infinite and that we must make an attempt to satisfy them, that progress, culture and civilization depended on our possibility to satisfy them, it would follow that our markets must increase and expand that they must be controlled by us and that we get more profit in the process of selling our goods and reduce the margin of others in

profit in buying the goods that we require from others for satisfying our wants. This is how the logic of exploitation functions." (1983, 24).

The concept of 'want' and Ethical hedonism

Prof. Barlingay brings to our notice that ethical hedonism is basically based on the concept of 'want', rather it is the misuse of the notion want (1983,22). According to him the words 'want' and 'satisfaction' in fact, properly belong to Psychology. But the Hedonist began to use them in Ethics. A human being has to have wishes, wants, desires and if these are fulfilled, he gets satisfaction also. Normally we use the word satisfaction in this sense. Every fulfillment or completion of our act leads to satisfaction.

The hedonists plead that satisfaction or pleasure is the end in itself and it is for the sake of pleasure that we strive. This concept of pleasure as an end, however, creates several difficulties and paradoxes.(1983,24) He says that "the word 'satisfaction, which the economists are fond of, is a twin of pleasure."(1983.25)

Logic of need based economy

Now how to control the exploitation which is the outcome of economics of want? Prof. Barlingay sees the possibility of control over exploitation in, need based economic social set up. According to him, the economic theory based on needs plays different logic and it develops differently. There is no room for infinite needs. Man does not have infinite needs and if they increase, they increase only to a certain extent. Prof. Barlingay grants that in the course of history, needs have changed and also increased. He says, "Man's needs increase no doubt. But they are dependent on resources available, i.e., they are dependent on consumption. And production depends on actual resources and the labour. The economics based on needs, therefore, will not lead to capitalism and imperialism. Man's initiative need not here be used for exploiting others although the exploitation is not ruled out."(1983, 26-27) And therefore need based economy is preferred.

A question can be raised, "Will there be scope for wants in need based economic set-up?" It seems that though wants will have a scope in such an

economy, needs will certainly have primacy over wants. "The first thing will be to satisfy the needs of all, only when there are still some resources left, we can think of comforts and luxuries. Need is a social element because it is common to all men. It has to be given preference over wants."(1983, 29)

Prof. Barlingay in this way presents a basic framework of the economics of needs by criticizing the economics of wants. He shows that the economics of wants has assumed the form of capitalist economy and that it accepts the ethics of hedonism. The economics of needs which he prefers can control and minimize exploitation. The alternative economics he subscribes to, assumes a more substantial and practical form in Gandhian economics according to him.

The rise to exploitation

The events from Industrial Revolution to Capitalism and from Capitalism, to Imperialism and Colonialism led to the establishment of a new science called economics or political economy. The authorship of this science goes to Adam Smith. This new science of economics naively accepted the principles of Individual Liberty (rights), Right to Property, and the Expansionist Policy(1983,32).

Prof. Barlingay brings to our notice that, this economy was exploitative in nature, it gave sugarcoating to want and founded the want based economy. For example, the concept of need was treated in two different manners. Either man's needs were not cared for, or man's needs and wants were not distinguished. In fact, prosperity was supposed to be the prosperity of the imperialist man, not of common man.

And the expansionist policy under the leadership of England continued both in England and in the countries of Western Europe and America. There was reaction to the expansionist policy by Rousseau, Ruskin, Tolstoy, Proudhon, Owen, Marx and Engels.

Thus the want based economy gives rise to exploitation either openly or in disguised form, or in sugarcoated form. Man was treated as means by men in almost all forms of powers : political power, wealth power, power of knowledge and power of the bureaucracy which again played the role of powerful institute.

As against this, the principles of Gandhian economy(Barlingay 1983, 30-41) try to humanize the economic policies. It gives humane face to them and tries to treat every individual as a valuable person in this world. Gandhian economy is value based economy and those values are ethical values by default.

Principles of Gandhian Economy

He notes the following principles as the principles of Gandhian economy(1983,33-34)

1. Whatever economic system may be adopted, it should not be based on exploitation, and if some exploitation is inevitable, it must be the minimum.
2. Although man was to be treated differently from a machine, it was still necessary to exploit the man power. Machine was not to be given absolute value.
3. Unlimited power of machine creates over-production and if the production is more than what can be consumed, it leads to finding out of more markets which again means exploitation.

Gandhi's economics has two tracks according to Prof. Barlingay:

- (1) the practical exigency which arose on account of the British rule and
- (2) a criticism of the general theory of economics, particularly of the capitalist origin.

Gandhian economic programme

How are we to look at the problem if we are to treat everyone equal and not to base our economy on exploitation or at least, base it on minimum exploitation? Prof. Barlingay suggests the following remedies, which can be called Gandhian economic programme (1983,36-40):

1. The first answer will be that if the progress based on exploitation is directly related to expansions of markets, and exploitation is to be given up, it should lead to contraction of markets. From the international markets, we must recede to national or even local markets.
2. Of course, we cannot march backward in time and so although, we can say that the more the exploitation, the more the markets, we would not strictly be able to adhere to the law that the less the exploitation the less the markets such that if there is no exploitation, there will be no markets at all, although we could still

say that if we have to reduce the exploitation, the expansion of markets also will have to be checked and reduced.

3. Either the nations would have to be self sufficient without any markets outside or the import and export of each nation would have to be equal, or if it was unequal after a few years, the trade loans of each nation would have to be squared in the greater interest of humanity.
4. But these kinds of trade agreements would ultimately create a cycle of exploitation. So Gandhian economy in general would be against them. Of course, it is not the case that there should be no trade at all, e.g. we are likely to require petroleum and it would have to be bought from outside.
5. Here Prof. Barlingay suggests that like the clearance window in the bank, there should be an international trade window such that in the committee of nations, when all things are taken into account, the import and export of each nation should be almost equal. There should not be mal-distribution due to markets.
6. A question can be asked whether we should be allowed to increase our wants, if this is to be achieved, Prof. Barlingay agrees that some increase of wants is certainly connected with better culture and progress and no one would say that man should develop an attitude of pure withdrawal from the world. But it is difficult to propound the doctrine that our wants should increase infinitely and continuously. There must be some proportion between the wants and the resources at our disposal. If our wants increase more than our resources can allow, then we are bound to become poor.
7. Need based economy will have implications to the use of machine. As we have seen, if wants increase beyond proportion they lead to exploitation. If the exploitation is to be checked, then the increase of wants also must be checked. If increase of wants is to be checked, then only that kind of machinery which is necessary and relevant to the social context will have to be used. The services of man will have to be used first. This, of course, does not mean that modern machinery should not be used. But if we have to prevent exploitation, there must be certain co-relation between productive capacity of machine and our wants and

needs. It is only for preventing such exploitation which is implied in the concept that man must be treated primarily as an end in itself.

If this brief background of Gandhian thought is taken into account, it will not be difficult to understand why the economists trained in the pattern of expansionist economy, criticized Gandhi as unscientific, utopian and feudalistic.

Conclusion

Gandhian economic thought, according to Prof. Barlingay has wider applicability. It can be applied all over the world, whether it is India, Tanzania, Mao's China or Tito's Yugoslavia. The man that we regard as unit will have to be treated as one and self-sufficient if the supremacy of man is to be affirmed(1983,41).

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