ECONOMIC EQUALITY: A PRE-REQUISITE FOR PEACE

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Abstract

This paper explores the critical relationship between economic equality and global peace, emphasizing that economic disparities go beyond income, encompassing access to education, healthcare, and basic resources. The study highlights that economic inequality not only has moral implications but also far-reaching consequences for social stability and peace. Examining various dimensions of economic inequality, including income, wealth, opportunity, and global disparities, the paper demonstrates how structural factors, demographic elements, and policy-related decisions contribute to this issue.

Furthermore, the paper outlines the disruptive impact of economic inequality on individuals and societies, including mental well-being, crime rates, political stability, social cohesion, and family dynamics. By examining the causes of economic inequality, such as technological advancements, educational disparities, and policy decisions, the paper advocates for a more inclusive and adaptable approach to modern economics.

In response to these challenges, the paper introduces the concept of Nonviolent Economics, which emphasizes cooperation, empathy, and ethical decision-making in economic activities. It argues that prioritizing nonviolence in economic interactions can lead to fair trade, equitable resource distribution, and inclusive policies, ultimately fostering a more harmonious and prosperous society.

Additionally, the paper emphasizes the importance of "Purity of Means" in economic endeavours, underscoring the need for ethical considerations alongside economic objectives. It advocates for transparency, accountability, and the avoidance of exploitative practices in economic processes. Finally, the paper proposes a "Restraint Lifestyle" as a means to address economic disparities, suggesting that by appreciating the pleasures derived from our senses and practicing moderation, individuals can contribute to greater societal peace and equity.

Drawing on insights from philosophers like Fritjof Capra and Mahatma Gandhi, this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of economic inequality's impact on peace and offers a framework for reimagining economic systems that prioritize well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Purity of Means, Restraint Lifestyle, Social disintegration, Political Stabilty, Nonviolence, Nonviolent Economics

Introduction

As societies grapple with a multitude of challenges from political to social and from cultural to environmental crisis; in between these, Economic Disparity remains a pressing global issue, with a significant gap between the world's richest and poorest individuals. A study shows that, 'The richest 10% in India own more than 40% of the country's total wealth, while the bottom half of the population together share just 30% of wealth.'[1] Such disparities are not only morally troubling but also have far reaching consequences for peace and stability worldwide. It encompasses not only disparities in income, but also uneven access to education, healthcare and basic resources.

Economic inequality, the stark divide between the haves and have nots, remains a prevalent issue across continents and within societies. The gap widens as wealth accumulates disproportionately, leaving a significant portion of the population struggling for access to basic necessities, education and health care. This disparity breeds social unrest and conflicts, thereby destabilising nations and regions.

This paper shall explore how addressing economic disparities can lead to a more harmonious and stable society and how economic equality shall contribute to a more peaceful environment.

Some key factors to consider what economic inequality is?

1. Income inequality: refers to the extent to which income is evenly distributed within a population. [2]
2. Wealth inequality: takes into account not only income, but also the overall accumulation of assets such as property, investments, saving, etc. over time.
3. Opportunity inequality: relates to disparities in access to quality education, health care, job opportunities and other resources that are crucial for social mobility.
4. Global economic inequality: refers to disparities in wealth and development between different countries or regions of the world. Like some countries have higher GDP's and better infrastructure, while others struggle with poverty.
5. Structural factors: are systemic issues such as discriminatory policies, unequal access to education and job opportunities and differences in social and economic capital, that can either exacerbate or mitigate economic disparity.

How economic disparity disturbs peace?

Economic inequality often referred to as the gap between the rich and the poor, is a critical issue that has profound implications for the stability and the harmony of each and every society. The unequal distribution of wealth and resources creates a multitude of challenges that can ultimately disrupt peace within a society. This disparity shall have significant implications for a society, including its potential to contribute to increased levels of violence. Here are some ways in which economic disparity hampers peace:

1. Disturbing individuals' life

Economic inequality is not just a matter of financial disparities, it has profound implications for the mental well-being of individuals and communities across all walks of life. The constant stress, anxiety and feelings of helplessness that stem from economic disparity can have severe consequences for mental well-being. The below are the ways in which inequality exerts influence on mental health and individuals' life.

- Limited access to basic resources –

  When a significant portion of how the population lacks access to basic necessities like food, water, healthcare, shelter, it shall lead to desperation and survival instincts, which shall result in individuals restoring to violent means to obtain what they need.
- Frustration and Resentment –

  The disparity among haves and have nots shall lead to feeling of frustration, resentment, helplessness, etc. among these who are disadvantaged. When people perceive that the system is unfair and their opportunities for advancement are limited, they shall engage in violent behaviour as a way to express their discontent and dissatisfaction.
- Social isolation and loneliness

  Individuals in lower income brackets may have fewer resources to engage in social activities and the stigma associated with poverty can lead to feelings of shame and isolation. The lack of social support networks can exacerbate feelings of depression and contribute to a decline in mental well-being.

2. Crimes

Criminal act rises of desperation when individuals or communities are denied access to resources and opportunities. In areas with high level of inequality, there may be an increase in crime and theft. This is

often attributed to a lack of opportunities and resources, as well as sense of alienation from society. Many such crimes which exerts a significant influence on various aspects of society are –

- Desperation and Property Crimes –
  Be left of meeting basic needs and lack of viable economic opportunities shall either make the person feel frustrated or, shall push individual towards criminal behaviour in the form of theft, burglary and robbery, as they seek alternative avenues to provide for themselves and their families.
- Social disintegration and violence –
  As the communities' experience disparity and disempowerment, social ties weaken, leading to violent crimes. The affected class shall resort to aggression and violence as a means of asserting control or gaining resources.
- Resource allocation and Law Enforcement challenges –
  Policing communities characterised by high levels of economic disparity demands significant resources, often resulting in stressed and overburdened law enforcement agencies. This can lead to challenges in effectively addressing criminal activities, potentially leading to an increased perception of lawlessness.

3. Political Instability

When a significant portion of population feels economically incapable, it shall erode trust in institutions and shall lead to political split. This can create an environment where violent political movements or extremist ideologies get in power. The coming point shows the nature of political instability in society:

- Rise of Populism and Extremist Movements –
  When a significant portion of the population feels differences, they are more susceptible to charismatic leaders who promise radical change. Populist leaders can exploit the frustrations of the disenfranchised, channelling them into movements that challenge established political norms, that shall lend to social unrest and political violence.
- Policy capture by Economic Elites –
  Economic inequality can result in policies that disproportionately favour the wealthy, which shall protect their interest at the expense of broader social welfare. These erodes public confidence in the political process and lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of inequality; thus, creating tensions and disputes.
- Unequal access to Political influence –
  Wealthy individuals and communities often have greater resource to invest in lobbying efforts, campaigns and advocacy. This unequal access skims political decisions in favour of those with economic power, further enhancing the disparities that shall drive towards violence and political instability.
- Ruining trust in Political Institutions –
  Generally, the political system serves the interests of wealthy people which lead to disillusionment and suspicion among the general population, which in turn, shall manifest in reducing vote turnout, decrease in civic participation and a growing sense of apathy towards the political process.

1. Decreased Social Cohesion

High level of economic disparity shell abrade trust in society. When individuals and groups perceive that they have little in common with these in other economic strata, it shall lead to a breakdown in community bonds and decrease in cooperation among one another. Following issues take place because of decrease in social cohesion –

- Erosion of trust in Institutions –
  Economic inequality shall ruin trust in societal institutions such as the government, legal system, etc. When individual perceives that these institutions favour the rich at the expense of disadvantaged, it breeds distrust and disillusionment which shall lead to a sense of detachment and disengagement from the community.
- Increase social segregation –
  Rich families gather together in certain neighbourhoods, so called Posh areas, while those with fewer resources are forced to live in areas with limited resources and opportunities. This separation not only limits exposure to diverse perspective, but also enhance the inferiority complex in poor.
- Rising level of Resentment and Discontent –
  Economic inequality shall breed feeling of resentment and discontent among different sections of the society. When individuals consider that their hard works and contributions are not adequately rewarded, it can lead to a sense of injustice, which in turn creates an environment of tension.
- Diminished sense of belonging & social identity –
  When individuals are treated on the basis of their economic status, it undermines their sense of attachment to their community. This loss of social identity can lead to feelings of isolation and detachment, further weakening the bond that holds the society together.

2. Family Disintegration
   Economic equality is a pervasive issue that affects every facet of society and one of its most piteous outcome is the disintegration of families. As wealth disparities widens, families find themselves grappling with mounting financial stress, limited opportunities and strained relationships. Below are some challenges the family faces because of economic inequality –

- Financial stress and marital strain-
  Families in power income brackets combat with the constant struggle to make ends meet, which can lead to raise tensions and arguments among spouse. The stress of not meeting basic needs and the constant fear of financial instability can take a toll on the emotional well-being of individuals, creating an environment opportune for marital discord and sometimes dissolution.
- Limited access to education and opportunities –
  Economic inequality restricts access to quality education and opportunities for children from disadvantaged families. Thus reduce chances of breaking free from the cycle, leading to a bleak outcook for future generation.
- Healthcare disparities and family well-being –
  Families with limited resources often struggle to afford adequate healthcare, leading to unmet medical needs and increases health risks. This not only affect the physical well-being of family members but also places a substantial emotional and financial burden on the family unit.
- Parental stress and its effect on children –
  The pressure to provide for basic needs, coupled with limited access to resources, can take a toll on parents mental and emotional well-being. This, in turn, affects their ability to provide a nurturing and stable environment for their children.

Factors affecting Economic Inequality

Economic inequality is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors as structural, demographic and policy related factors. These causes often interact with and reinforce one another, creating a cycle that perpetuates inequality.

Structural Factors:

- Advances in technology shall lead to increased productivity but they may also lead to job displacement or wage stagnation for certain group of workers, exacerbating income disparities.
- Disparities in access to quality education and training opportunities shall lead to difference in skills and qualifications. This in turn can result in wage gaps between individuals, as those with higher skills tend to command higher wages.
- Increased international trade and investment shall lead to winners and losers within an economy. Industries that face increased global competition may experience wage pressure, while others may benefit from access to new markets and opportunities.
- Factors such as discriminating policies and unequal access to capital have led to disparities in wealth accumulation. This inequality can persist over generations, contributing to long-term economic disparities.

Demographic Factors:

Demographic factors play a significant role in shaping economic inequality within a society. These factors influence individuals access to education, employment opportunities, income and wealth accumulation. Below are some factors that affects economic inequality –

1. Disparities in educational attainment levels contribute to economic inequality. Individuals with higher level of education tend to have access to better paying jobs and opportunities for advancement.
2. Women earn less than men for similar work. This gap can be attributed to factors like occupational segregation, discrimination and difference in negotiation and promotion opportunities.
3. Inheritances and wealth transfer play a role in economic inequality. Older generations may have accumulated more wealth, providing advantages to their descendants. And on the other side, younger individuals entering the job market may face challenges in securing employment due to limited experience and educational attainment.
4. Different regions within a country may have varying levels of economic development and opportunities, leading to disparities in income and wealth.

Policy-related Factors:

Policies play a significant role in influencing economic inequality. They can either exacerbate or mitigate inequality depending on their design and implementation. Here are some ways in which policies shall affect and raise economic inequality –

- Taxation is a powerful tool in shaping economic inequality. Regressive taxes which take a larger percentage of income from lower-income individuals, can widen the wealth gap, exacerbate inequality. For example, if a country relies heavily on regressive taxes like Sales Tax, it places a greater financial burden on lower income individuals related to their income.
- Education policies that don't provide equal access to quality education can perpetuate inequality. For example, if funding for schools in lower income areas is significantly lower than in wealthier areas, it can lead to disparities in educational outcomes.
- Policies that do not provide a safety net for those facing economic hardships, such as unemployment benefits, food assistance and housing support can lead to greater disparities in economic well-being.
- The way central banks manage interest rates and inflation can affect income distribution. If monetary policy favours low interest rates, it can stimulate economic growth but may also disproportionately benefit asset owners and potentially raising wealth inequality.

Addressing Economic Inequality

Famous Western Philosopher, Fritjof Capra states in his book 'The Turning Point'- "At the beginning of the last two decades of our country, we find ourselves in a state of profound worldwide crisis. It is a complex, multi-dimensional crisis whose facets touch every aspect of our lives, our health and livelihood, the quality of our environment and our social relationships, our economy technology and politics. It is a crisis of intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions, a crisis of a scale and urgency unprecedented in recorded human history. For the first time we have to face the real threat of extinction of the human race and of all life on this planet".[1] Today, the society is passing through unequal economic relations. On one side, is the consumer society of rich and developed countries and on the other side, is the producer society of poor countries which work hard to feed the rich nations. The luxurious lifestyle of the rich society has created an existential crisis for millions of people in poor countries. Thomas Fuller has rightly said that, "The pleasure of the rich are bought with the tears of poors".

The foundation of Modern Economics relies on the principle of multiplying desires, increasing needs and expanding demands devoid of morality and values, for which inequality in society takes place. Modern Economics faces a complex set of challenges in today's society which encompasses disparities in income, wealth and oppurtunities among individuals and groups within a society. One prominent issue is economic inequality as wealth disparities continue to widen, exacerbating social tensions, increasing the gap between haves and have nots thus hampering societal peace. Additionally the discipline grapples with the complexities of environmental sustainability as its considers wealth paramount. The abovesaid dilemmas underscore the need for a more inclusive, adaptable and holistic approach to modern economics, one that embraces a broader spectrum of perspectives and considers the well-being of both- individuals and the planet. Economics of Nonviolence is one such option based on morality, human values and restraint lifestyle which can provide solution to all modern economic problems. This can be defined as shown below:

Modern Economics
⇓
Unlimited Desires
⇓
Infinite Needs
⇓
Increase in Demands
⇓
Production at large scale
⇓
Excessive Income
⇓
Unequal distribution of Income
⇓
Demand for Consumer Goods
⇓
Excess in Production
⇓
Endless chain of modern economics

Economics of Nonviolence

↓

Restraint

↓

Limited desires

↓

Minimization of Needs

↓

Limited Demand

↓

Limited Production

↓

Limited Income

↓

Equal distribution of Income

↓

Limited Consumption

↓

Limited Demand

Above diagrams presents the comparative study of Modern Economics and Economics of Nonviolence from the point of view of Economic activities. It can be said that in Economics of Nonviolence; all economic activities like production, consumption and distribution are conducted on the basis of basic principles of Nonviolence and Human values so that all men can achieve real welfare by achieving real happiness and satisfaction.

Nonviolence

Nonviolence in economics represents a foundational principle that emphasizes cooperation, empathy, and ethical decision-making in economic activities. It asserts that economic interactions should not lead to harm, exploitation, or conflict. This philosophy advocates for fair trade, equitable distribution of resources, and inclusive policies that uplift marginalized communities. Nonviolent economics also extends to sustainable practices, urging responsible stewardship of natural resources to ensure their availability for future generations. By prioritizing peaceful and collaborative approaches, nonviolence fosters an environment where economic growth is inclusive and benefits society as a whole, rather than perpetuating inequalities or causing harm to individuals or the environment. It encourages a shift towards economic models that prioritize well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability, ultimately leading to a more harmonious and prosperous society.

Nonviolence serves as a powerful catalyst for enhancing economic equality within a society. By renouncing aggressive and coercive methods, individuals and communities can foster an environment of cooperation, mutual respect, and inclusivity. This paves the way for open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving, allowing for the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. Nonviolence encourages the establishment of fair and just policies, which in turn promote social mobility and provide a level playing field for all members of society. Moreover, a nonviolent approach fosters trust and stability, creating an atmosphere conducive to sustainable economic growth. It reduces the costs associated with conflict and violence, allowing resources to be redirected towards productive endeavors that benefit the entire community. Ultimately, Nonviolent Economics fosters a more inclusive and

prosperous society, where economic gains are shared more equitably among its members.

Purity of Means in seeking Ends

This refers to the ethical principle that the methods employed to achieve economic ends should be morally sound, just, and in alignment with societal values. It emphasizes that the pursuit of economic goals should not come at the expense of integrity, fairness, or the well-being of individuals and communities. This concept is particularly significant in the context of economic development and policymaking. It asserts that the strategies, policies, and practices employed by governments, businesses, and institutions should not only aim for economic growth and prosperity, but also prioritize social equity, environmental sustainability, and the protection of human rights.

Purity of means also highlights the importance of transparency and accountability in economic processes. It calls for the avoidance of exploitative practices, such as fraud, corruption, or the violation of labour rights and encourages open and honest communication, as well as a commitment to providing accurate and accessible information to stakeholders, thereby fostering trust and confidence in economic activities.

Ultimately, recognizing and valuing purity of means in economics is essential for creating sustainable, just, and prosperous societies. By prioritizing ethical considerations alongside economic objectives, we can work towards a more equitable and harmonious global economy that benefits all members of society, both now and for future generations**.**

Restraint Lifestyle

Fostering a genuine appreciation for the pleasures derived from our senses and their respective objects can inadvertently give rise to avarice, leading to a self-centered and potentially violent disposition. Our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, touch, and mind represent the six senses, each inclined towards seeking gratification from their corresponding objects: the visible, audible, odorous, sapid, tangible, and conceptual. This pursuit of pleasure begets attachment and subsequently breeds tension, disrupting inner peace and mental clarity. The prevailing economic disparities in today's world can be attributed to the unrestrained lifestyles of the rich. This unrestrained spending not only leads to wastage of resources but also fuels jealousy, fomenting bitterness and animosity within society.

Putting aside activities that are not absolutely necessary, a sense of concentration leading to insight shall prevail. Losing the burden of consumerism and competition which has overburdened the natural resources available, a sense of equality and unanimity shall prevail leading to peace of mind and body. The message has provided an unparalleled concern for harmony amongst life forms, leading to a common ethos based on minimal consumption of natural resources, particularly for members of religious orders.

As truly said by M K Gandhi, “Earth provides enough to satisfy every person’s needs, but not every person’s greed”. A restrained approach to life not only preserves our precious resources but also narrows the divide between the affluent and the underprivileged, fostering peace. Even celestial bodies like the Moon and the Sun adhere to their designated orbits through self-imposed restraint; similarly, humans ought to embrace restraint across all facets of life to attain contentment and tranquility. An economy based on unlimited material consumption, excessive competition and on the reduction of all quality to quantity is not viable in the long sum and is bound to collapse sooner or later. If we internalize the costs of environmental degradation, social disruption like terrorism and war, the economic progress that we attained becomes far from the real progress.

Growing in the virtues, especially prudence (knowing what to seek and what to avoid) forms good character. The virtue of prudence shall lead to lesser conflicts, societal animosity, class differences,

international disputes and much more that are needed to establish an everlasting peace. The principle of 'Aparigraha', deeply embedded in Indian culture, especially within Jainism, imparts valuable wisdom on revering all forms of life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, economic equality stands as a pivotal prerequisite for lasting peace in our global society. The chasm between the affluent and the disadvantaged, encompassing income, wealth, and opportunity, not only raises moral concerns but also spawns a multitude of challenges that reverberate across nations. The ramifications of economic inequality touch upon every aspect of life, from mental well-being to social cohesion, from crime rates to political stability.

Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of economic inequality. Structural, demographic, and policy-related factors all play significant roles in perpetuating disparities. It is imperative to reevaluate our economic systems and policies to ensure they promote fairness, inclusivity, and sustainability.

Nonviolence emerges as a guiding principle in reshaping our economic landscape. By emphasizing cooperation, empathy, and ethical decision-making, we can forge a path toward a more equitable and harmonious society. Purity of means and a restraint lifestyle further underscore the importance of ethical considerations in economic activities. This approach not only preserves resources but also fosters a sense of unity and contentment.

Ultimately, as we navigate the complex challenges of our interconnected world, it is crucial to recognize that economic equality is not only an end in itself but also a cornerstone for a more peaceful and prosperous future for all. Embracing the principles of nonviolence, purity of means, and restraint can pave the way for a society where the well-being of individuals and the planet are at the forefront of our economic endeavors.

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