

Rich and Poor : A Paradigm of Mutual Co-Existence ?

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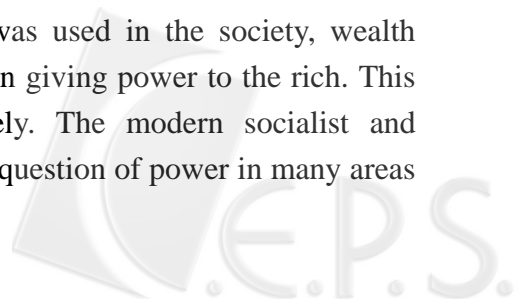
Abstract

The division of rich and poor in a society is unavoidable. In the modern times, the power structure due to wealth is stronger in health care and in environmental projects. The bioethical problems in those areas due to this are discussed. The problem mostly stems from the sense of alienation in both segments of the society, the executor and the user. Some of the ways to minimize this alienation are discussed. Finally arguments have been put forward that the feeling of alienation towards the environment is the root cause for the present environmental degradation.

(Key words: Bioethics – Poor, Rich – North, South – Global Bioethics - Environment)

As discussed else where, the bioethical evaluation used in the areas of clinical research involving human subjects and environment exhibit double standards in terms of application in North and Southern countries. The remarkable distinguishing dividing factor of these countries is wealth. Here, I would like to look at the wealth distribution and bioethical implication and bioethical implications. Further, I would like to raise a question that, do rich have a responsibility to poor. I do not want to look at the economical aspects of wealth but want to look at how it affects all aspects of life including the moral fiber of the society.

We all know that even before money was used in the society, wealth played a major role in the barter systems also in giving power to the rich. This power is used either positively or negatively. The modern socialist and philosopher, Michel Foucault has looked at the question of power in many areas viz. Medicine, gender and in correction.



In the market economy, price is the regulating factor and in the modern times, the rich uses that power in acquiring many consumable products. Till recently, some of the social institutions were not considered as part of the consumer market economy because of the interaction of the two extremes opposite natured participants. Education for example was considered for a long time not to be determined by the consumer market system. This was because of the protection given by the public investment. This protection was given in the first place to avoid exploitation of the vulnerable knowledge seekers from the knowledge givers and possessors. This was the same in the health care and judicial system. Atleast in all these three situations the power polarization due to the one side giving i.e. health, knowledge or justice. Now, as the scenario changes in many nations consumer market economy plays a major role in these institutions. This change had kindled bioethics to come to front as distributive justice has become seriously constrained.

The health care givers in the traditional Medicare of any society did not demand any payment for their services to cure. In the Hindu society, the health care giver believed that the medicine would not heal the patient, if payment were demanded. However, the patient believed that unless compensation was paid medicine would not heal. Thus, there was neither demand nor bargain. Simply based on the logic that nothing comes free, the patient who is at the receiving end make sure that, not to carry the burden of the action of receiving from the health care giver without compensating that action.

Moreover, to avoid the implicated burden of the patient leading to exploitation, the health care giver was giving a warning about the demand or fixing up a price for the services. The reward for the services was determined according to the patient's value on the serviced, in that particular time and space. Further, the prohibition on the health care giver kept to the power at the edge. Thus, vulnerability of sickness and potential explosiveness of curing was averted in these traditional practices.

However, in the modern times the health care services are clearly price tagged since machines, the symbol of technological progress, are increasingly used. The machines are human inventions for not only making profits but also to maintain a distance from the consuming segments. This distancing in a way increases the power to manipulate from the other side. This distancing in the modern health care is further exasperated by the amount of resources invested

on. The more money is invested the more distancing of the vulnerable from the others. This in turn, make the others to exploit and also justify their way by diverting their main interest on the investment rather than on service i.e. to take care of the vulnerable, sick, and weak.

The wealth like to keep alike company and to maintain the power structure. Therefore, the dynamic nature has been made to be “static”. Static in the sense to go only in one direction which is always up and not in circles/cycles as the natural things occurs. Thus, there is pressure to maintain the static position, new means is devised to move up wards. The human lives are now price tagged.

The modern technology has introduced the pricing system; now, not only to the human services but also to humans themselves. With the advent of transplantation technology, healthy human beings are viewed as “Organ farms”. The poor but healthy human beings were hunted as public land products. The power behind this technology did not limit the exploitation only to the poor but some times also prisoners and mentally compromised people. They became powerless because of their forced living in the less restricted and the most watched space. This constant watching by the panoptic architecture according to Foucault makes the prisoners and other captives vulnerable. In few nations because of their political set-up, government adapts non-interference policy leading to human organ harvest as a ludicrous business adventure. Here also, wealth plays a dominant determinant role. Rich recipients from the powerless poor captives rather than from the rich captives are enjoying the harvest.

Now, another technology is at the verge of putting a bigger wedge between rich and poor. The Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) serves both rich and poor. In the transplantation technology, the separated organs become means for some body, but in the ART, intact organs are used as a means for some body else. The ends thro’ these means benefit some, other than the person themselves. In the transplantation technology, varied ends like excretion, pumping blood, sight, metabolism does not help the original possessor but some body by the means of transplanted kidney, heart, eye and liver. In the ART, uterus is a means to achieve the end of reproduction (i.e.) baby which is used/adapted by some one else. In other words, the humans (with the intact organs) are being used for some other person to give the end (i.e.) a child. Many religion and ancient traditions have talked about at least about the second

practice (i.e. surrogacy) purely on altruistic manner, even in those days of feudal set-up rich women and royal women forced poor women and commoner to have their babies by executing the power over the weak.

In the pure altruism, the donor completely knows the consequences but is willing to undergo the suffering, pain and separation as sacrifice to give the benefit to whom the donor may be or may not be connected emotionally. In many countries the cadaver organ harvest is done on the willing prior consent of the donor to some unknown, is a best exemplary post-humans altruism. However, in the early days of kidney transplantation and other transplantation market did decide the value of the human organ.

However, as money and power become more dominant, application of bioethics or bioethical analysis is being neglected. Both money and power are interested in gaining immediate benefits. Local, short-term benefits-oriented values are being used in the application of money and power in these institutions. The decisions, based on the immediate and short-term benefit yielding values, are rooted on the local moral values. This leading to problems of negligence contravention of universal ethical values which is strongly anchored on the principles of transcendent and long-term benefits.

Similar examples like genetic engineering and others in the modern medical technology had been discussed widely in the literature. All of them substantiate the vulnerability of the segments with less resource in wealth and knowledge. Further, other type of vulnerability related to gender, space and time had been reported in the medical practice and in other institution also. However, now, I would like to look into the vulnerability of another bio entity (i.e.) the environment.

Collectively, the humanity uses the environment for its existence. However, the dependency rate varies according to the wealth accumulated and available excess wealth. Moreover, some nations depend on the basic elements of the Nature directly, some use them indirectly. The indirect use of the basic elements like water, forest and the earth usually depend on the modern technological advancements. The modern technological advancement induces more mechanization, which would be possible only with the excessive wealth. Lack of mechanization keeps nations in the resource poor status but they always long to have the resources for indirect use of the basic elements of the environment. Further, the indirect use induces alienation, as in the modern

health care.

Alienation due to wealth and technology increase the chances of using a person as a means for the end to benefit for some other person. It is a natural law and in the society, one is being used as means to achieve the benefits in favor of some one else. However, the beneficiary always remembers the benefits and the means by which it was achieved and tries to benefit the provider or the community at large. This may be seen in the simple colony or cluster of plants, where new plants came into existence by the means of older plants. The process of genesis of a new life used the potentiality of the existing older life as a means to reach the end i.e. a new life. However, the younger life stays in the community to give protection to the older life and gain protection, strengthens the community, and maintains the continuity of that particular life.

In higher life, also the community is used as a means but, at the same time community also gains. Human beings also in the sense are not much different. The embryo uses the mother's potential nature of support giving, and grows out to become a full grown infant. In higher life even after the period of parasitic existence of the embryo, the motherness is continued to being used in the protection of the family structure for the physical, mental and spiritual development of the infant/baby. Now, the question may arise, is it just, using mother, and family as a means to the end i.e. the development of the child. However, this dependency for development does benefit the one who had been used and the community. The return benefits from the child are recognized in many ways, in the social and mental well being of that family, community. In this aspect, the reverse may be used some times. In the community development and in the family, society building the mutual 'exploitation ' is necessary, unavoidable and some times, it is even encouraged. Sacrifices or altruism are encouraged and accepted although there is a degree of one way exploitation. This exploitation is however allowed happening by the willing member of the society.

However, the environment from which we are all benefiting is not considered, as one needs mutual care and nurturing. Nevertheless, in the traditional culture, the environment, the natural elements, trees, plants, animals are all respected and taken care as the member of their society or family or as the protector/provider/destroyer of that society and family. These traditional societies live closer to the environment or enjoy the benefits of the environment

directly rather than indirectly as the modern urban industrialized society do. This type of direct dependency of the environment had created a sense of responsibility in those consumers. Because of that, they used several means to reduce the dependency and replenish the loss due to dependency. Further, they increased the ways to find more uses as shown in a movie, an uncomplicated traditional community found an empty coke bottle, discarded by the modern society. However, they could use that bottle in many ways in the community even as a weapon. Similarly, in the traditional Hindu society or any Asian or African or native Canadian or American society the whole community used to get involved in major decisions like cutting a tree or making a well. Deliberations used to take, some times days, months even years, which, usually centered around finding an alternative or how to compensate the loss. For example, to compensate the loss of a single tree several trees would be planted, so that the future society will not be deprived of it. This kind of responsible behavior could be seen only in societies who were using the environment for direct consumption.

In the developmental projects, environmental exploitation is justified. In this game, environment is being damaged badly and resources are being depleted in a faster rate. Here also, alienation plays the pivotal role in this globalization era. Transnational organizations usually use different yardsticks in the ethical evaluation in the host countries and in their home (sponsored) countries. Here, political, cultural and economical alienation all together increases the distance of the mean and the end. This, resulting in the operation of mega transnational projects in complete ethical vacuum.

The indirect consumption of the environment can not make one make one responsible because of the distance of the means and the end it maintains. The closer one is with the means, the exploitation is minimal. In the modern society the energy wastage, whether domestic or industrial, is the direct reflection of the distancing from the means. Similarly, the distancing from the environment increases the industrial, urban pollution of the environment. The technological mechanized weapon building brings the alienation among the nations resulting mass scale destruction of the humanity in the name of defense, culture purification and peace keeping.

I am not sure, whether; we will make any progress in that direction. Because, we have seen from the time of World war II several declarations on

human experimentation have been released but, still, we are hearing the horror stories of Tsukagee, US prisoners are being used as experimental subjects and mentally handicapped children are being used in dangerous experiments. Even, the new proposed changes in the Helsinki declaration may not stop the human experiments and similarly the environmental degradation in the Southern countries by the involvement of transnational companies.

There have been proposals like the Montreal statement to reduce the Co2 emission and greenhouse effect with green tax. However, these proposals had problems. The Southern countries which are in the race of development felt, that, they have been victimized. Some of the resource starved Southern countries were willing to sell their allocation to the resource rich Northern countries and capitalize their quota.

The disparity between the rich and poor developed and under developed, healthy and sick, aged and not aged are all part of the natural process. However, in the natural system the disparity is always over looked or made into a useful way of coexistence. These antagonistic situations do exist as part of the natural mutual phenomenon. Without one, the other does not even being recognized, sickness helps us to recognize, that, the precious stage was health and because of that the importance and the need of health is realized. Further, this experience helps one to take care of somebody compassionately and establishes the kinship. Sickness further gave the incentive to the human kind learn about the sickness and to find ways to remedy it. In other areas like education, the same compassionate attitude towards knowledge seekers was taken. The ignorance of the knowledge seekers was considered against one's own ignorance and made to share the enlightenment. This enlightenment sharing was not considered, as power giving since, the knowledge seeker and giver knew the relativness and the mutual dependency of etch other. Thus, these situations of mutual dependency do exist. Further, the ignorance like the sickness is dynamic in nature and goes in a cyclic process as any other natural phenomenon.

In the situations where, rich and poor are involved, the same reality has to be realized. The opportunities, which are available to somebody due to richness, have to be shared but not for the reward to maintain the power structure of rich. In the transnational involvement and in the aids programs, the power factor is always maintained. The perpetual one side dependency is created and Sustained. The Southern countries are not allowed to realize their potentials to contribute

in the global development. Global development is considered as mono faceted rather than poly fac than the local culture based moral values should be considered in these evaluations. The moral values are always subject to interpretation and their application gets constrained by time and space.

In his classic book on Practical Ethics, Peter Singer discusses about an age-old global practice of fortunate contributing 10% of their income to help unfortunates. This practice stems out of compassionate nature and tries to maintain the society with disparities of rich and poor. This practice is historically old and had survived the test of time. Now, this practice should be advocated in the transnational programs, business enterprising or any other of that nature. This allocation should be provided in addition to taxes and any other collections. This allocation is from the income of that program in that place inspite of their future investments or not. This contribution is to be spent by the host for replenishing any loss due to the project or for upgrading themselves in the areas where independency can be achieved. This should be paving the way for mutual dependency. In this manner, using some one or a whole nation as means for some others end, will be minimized if not eliminated.

We have proposed earlier, when rampant commercialism was seen in India in the organs' sales, a way of establishing an endowment and giving benefits to the donor. In this, we argued that long term sustainable help to the poor donors will be available and at the same time, the secrecy of the donor and recipient would be maintained. The latter, we argued is necessary to avoid the reverse exploitation. Similar ways of long-term sustainable benefit giving methods should be devised individually to suit each situation and maintained.

Further, the host countries should receive sufficient support in acquiring knowledge in that area, for example to differentiate the market survey used for identifying the potential buyers from the research survey. Now a day this is a common practice of the transnational drug research companies sponsoring "research" survey actually, to assess the market. Similarly, the environmental feasibility studies should be differentiated from project viability studies. In all these, what is the responsibility of the sponsor? Sponsor's responsibility in terms of legal applications may not be constraining but sponsors should take the responsibility for a transcendent, distant, future of the host. The responsibility to curb the alienation due to the distance should be the realized. As the famous

Native American Chief said, an environment we are enjoying now is inherited for the purpose of safe keeping for the future generation's (i.e.) not having the sense of alienation in the faraway generation.

The responsibility towards the future stems from the central axiom of all the bioethical principles, the concern for other. The other include all bio or non-bio entities. The other is recognizing the connectives of one other. The other is recognizing the dynamic nature of every thing and in all things. The other is recognizing the transformation and taking responsibility. Talking responsibility towards the actions and reactions. Taking responsibility for the garbage, pollution, environmental degradation, war and destruction. Taking responsibility of population, abortion, euthanasia, and genetic engineering. Taking responsibility of the unfortunates whenever it is possible. This should not be for personal benefits as the globalization era has brought. I am not arguing that rich have a responsibility for the poor, however, they do have a responsibility to reduce the distance between them.

I have tried to argue in this essay, that, some of the disparities in this world are unavoidable. Disparity becomes wider when the feeling of alienation sets in. Further, I have tried here to discuss some means to reduce the sense of alienation and taking responsibility.

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