



## WORLD STARVATION AND THE LIFEBOAT ETHICS: A CRITICAL DISCUSSION

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### ABSTRACT :

*The world had entered into a new millennium in 2000. The United Nations (UN) had set the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for creating a better world. In that programme a prime importance was given on eradication of extreme poverty around the world. Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that as per the World Bank report almost 3.4 billion people that comprises almost half of the world's population still struggle to meet basic needs. It is found in a report of UNESCO that starvation takes away life of about 22000 children in a day in the year 2009. It is the developing nations that mainly face the challenge of poverty and its curse. Developed nations on the other hand used to enjoy far more resource than their actual needs. The question now is that whether developed nations have some ethical obligation to sharing their extra resources with the developing nations. We shall try to find an answer of the question in our discussion.*

**KEYWORDS :** Poverty, Lifeboat ethics, Developed-Developing countries, Equality, mortality .

### INTRODUCTION

The world actually is a world of contradiction. The inconsistency comes from sheer imbalance or inequality. A massive inequality lies between the developed nations and the developing nations in question of three essential needs of people to survive. These are food, clothing and shelter (*ruti, kapdha and mokan*). A study says that there are some parts of the world where a child dies of hunger in every 5 seconds; in the same world there are places where the biggest problem for a person is to choose a sweater that should wear with which jeans. What a contradiction! And the contradiction attracts ethical debates. Prior going to the detail of the matter it is necessary for us to look at the world starvation and poverty for sake of our discussion.

Let us try to understand what poverty is. Poverty as we generally understand it as a situation where there is a scarcity of those which are essential to live. It is a condition in which people are unable to enjoy a minimum standard of living for lack of the essential needs. (1) The United Nations defines poverty as the inability of getting choices and opportunities to live a dignified life. Situations where people do not have enough to feed and clothes, do not have access to education and medical facilities, do not have own land to grow food for personal consumption and/or not having a job or an opportunity to get a job to earn one's living is called poverty. The World Bank defines poverty as a deprivation of well-being which includes low incomes and the inability to acquire basic goods and services deemed necessary for survival with dignity. All in all poverty is a situation where people are unable to live a dignified life because of not having basic resources to survive.



### **Inequality among Nations**

Poverty is a hard reality. It is the fact that in some parts of the world people die in hunger almost every second. And there are some parts of the world which are quiet untouched by starvation and starvation related death. The world based on economic parameter has been classified into two categories: developed nations and developing nations. The Developed nations are those which are more industrialized and have higher per capita income levels. Generally a country is considered to be developed if its per capita income is around or above \$12,000. Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that the average per capita income of developed countries is approximately \$38,000. That is much higher than the standard per capita income level of being a developed nation. A very few countries such as the United States of America, Canada, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, Singapore, Taiwan, Israel, countries of Western Europe, and some Arab states are considered to be developed nations. Records tell that out of total 7.5 billion population of the world just 1.3 billion people live in the developed countries (as per the report 2012) but this small percentage of people of the world used to consume almost 88% of the world's resources.

The developing nations are those which are less industrialized and have lower per capita income levels. Developing nations can be divided further into moderately developed or less developed countries. Countries which have per capita income more than \$1,000 but less than \$12,000 are called moderately developed. As of 2012, around 4.9 billion people live in the moderately developed nations. Some of the most recognizable moderately developed countries are Mexico, China, Indonesia, Jordan, Russia etc. And the countries whose per capita income is less than \$1,000 are called less developed countries. In many of these countries, the average per capita income is as low as \$500. Most of the countries in Africa, South America and Southern Asia (including Indian sub-continent) belong to this group. (3)

### **World Starvation and Consequences**

Roughly there are seven and half billion people now live in the World. Out of the total population almost half of the world population live on less than \$2.50 a day. A study reveals that the poorest 40% of world population generates just about 5% of global income; while the wealthiest 20% of the population generates 75% of world income. It is estimated in a report of UNICEF in the year 2011 that the poverty is the cause of daily mortality for about 22,000 children ages between five in 2009. Thus, in a calendar year, more than eight million children do not progress past the age of five years. (4) As per the World Bank's report that almost 3.4 billion people in the world still struggle to meet their basic needs and are in extreme poverty. (5)

Globally, 9.2 million children die each year before their fifth birthday. It is the infant mortality rate that the United Nations used to use as an indicator to monitor the progress of its goal "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages". A study was conducted across 135 countries over the course of 11 years and it was found that the continent of Africa having the highest infant mortality rate with 68 deaths per 1,000 live births. It is the Less Developed countries where the infant mortality rate is too high comparatively more developed countries. Developed countries are far better position in the question of infant mortality. (6)

Here is a record where we find highest infant mortality rates of the top five countries and the five countries where the mortality rates are lowest

Rank	Country	Infant mortality rate (deaths/1,000 live births)
1	Afghanistan	121.63
2	Niger	109.98
3	Mali	109.08
4	Somalia	103.72
5	Central African Republic	97.17
218	Sweden	2.74
219	Singapore	2.65
220	Bermuda	2.47
221	Japan	2.21
222	Monaco	1.80

It is the fact that there is a massive inequality subsists between developed countries and developing countries in question of fulfilment of basis needs and living standard. The United Nations used to speak of global inclusive growth and equality. However, the real picture of the world just depicts the opposite and global equality is far crying phenomena. Death because of starvation is undesirable but it happens and it happens primarily in the developing nations. Eradication of poverty is necessary and a challenge to the world. The United Nations had set a goal for it in its MDG but it does not occur till now. It is possible only by the uplift of poor nations. The question is that how it could be possible and what is the possible measure that could be taken to address the world hunger? A line of thought is that the developed nations should come forward and help the poor nations to tackle their problems. Another line of thought claims just the opposite. They are in favour of the view that developed nations are not ethically bound to help developing nations. They think that people in rich nations should do nothing for the people of poor nations. In order to establish the point G. Hardin had presented his Lifeboat argument. (7) Let us see, what the so-called lifeboat argument implies.

### LIFE BOAT ARGUMENT

Hardin in his argument compares the world to a lifeboat with a carrying capacity of just 60 people. There are 50 people on the boat which represents rich nations; while 100 others who are almost drowning in the ocean stands for the poor nations. The question is that whether the drowning people should be allowed to climb at the life boat? Hardin's view is that no admission should be granted at the boat. The question is that "Why no one should be allowed to climb at the lifeboat?" He explains his position comparing ethical implications of three alternatives that can be assumed under such a condition.

**1<sup>st</sup> alternative:** 50 people of the lifeboat should allow 10 out of 100 drowning people to climb at the boat, or  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Alternative:** 50 people of the lifeboat should allow all the drowning people, i.e 100 people at the boat, or  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Alternative:** People of the lifeboat should just pass ignoring the condition of drowning people.  
 Let us see, out of the said alternatives which one is reasonable and so ethical.

In case of 1<sup>st</sup> alternative 50 people of the lifeboat should allow 10 out of 100 drowning people to climb at the boat because the boat can carry maximum number of 60 people. Such a decision involves an inner inconsistency, because it would be justifiable to those who are allowed and at the same time it would be unjustifiable to those who are not allowed. Hence, the decision of allowing some people at the boat is ethical and not ethical at the same time and so unacceptable. Applying the same logic, if developed or rich

nations offer help to some poor nations according their capability, it would be justifiable to those nations which will receive the help and would be unjustifiable which will not receive the help. Hence, because of inherent inconsistency developed nations should not offer help to some poor nations.

In case of 2<sup>nd</sup> Alternative 50 people of the lifeboat should allow all the drowning people, i.e 100 people at the boat. In such a case all the 150 people will be drown simple because the can carry maximum number of 60 people only. Applying the same logic, if developed nations attempt to help all the poor nations going beyond their capacity, the starvation will spread all across the world. Hence, the decision of helping all the poor nations is unacceptable for practical ground.

Hence, only the 3<sup>rd</sup> Alternative can stand under such a condition. And it is that people of the lifeboat should pass the ocean ignoring the condition of the drowning people. Applying the same logic, it should be said that developed nations could do nothing for the poor nations. And it is the most cogent decision under the consequentialist ethics.

The argument seems to very impressive and cogent. But it is just apparent. A closer analysis reveals its inner weaknesses.

**A Consequentialist principle:** There is a principle of consequentialist ethics that *in a certain circumstances we have to accept certain lesser evil to protect possible greater evil*. Let us try to understand the principle. Suppose one is in such a position where he has two alternatives before him and he is bound to choose one. And whatever the alternative he chooses that results undesirable consequences. The ethical question is that what the man should do in such a circumstances. The consequentialist ethics says that in such a case one should choose that alternative which results less evil. The reason behind is that if he choose or accepts lesser evil he will able to make a defence against that which results greater evil. Let us take an example, suppose one is going to his friend's birthday party with well-dressed. Suddenly, on his way he notices a little boy accidently falls into a high drain. The boy should be rescued immediately and for that none other the man himself should down in the high drain because no one is nearby. What the man should do at the situation? He has only two alternatives: (1) Save the boy by downing in the drain or (2) overlooking the incident just pass the road. Both the alternatives results undesirable consequences. If he chooses the first one the boy would be saved but his dress will be mudded and he could not be able to attain the party. And if he chooses the second one the little boy would die. Consequentialist ethics will say the man should choose the first alternative. Because the death of the little boy is far undesirable than that of mudded his clothes. Hence, the man is ethically bound to save the little boy. Similarly, It is undesirable the death of innocent people in hunger and it is also undesirable to donate own extra resource to the unknown people living in other nations. Nevertheless, the first one is more undesirable in compare with the second one. Hence, it can be stated that according to consequentialist ethics the rich nations should help poor nations and it is their ethical obligation. (8)

**Perspective of Globalization:** Globalization is a concept that urges to think beyond boundaries of the nations. It speaks of the global integration of international trade, investment, information technology and cultures. It has been argued that globalization boost development in poorer countries and raise standards of living for their people. It involves both open market economy and universal brotherhood. The two are the two sides of a coin. One cannot be accepted without the other under the concept of globalization. It is the fact that the developed nations has financially prospered by making business in the third world countries. The huge number of people in the third world is the main consumer of the developed ones. As it happens just by advocating open market economy under the concept of globalization the first world countries have earned profit a lot for themselves; now it is their ethical obligation to come forward and support poor nations during their hard times following the principle of universal brotherhood, which is the other side of globalization. (9)

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion we may come to the point that poverty is one of the major challenges to the world till now and that should be faced and tackled compassionately. The General Assembly of the United Nations had considered in 1996 that eradicating poverty is an ethical, political, social and economic imperative of humankind. The very idea was shared by the intellectuals who were working in the field of International development, trade organizations and financial sectors. However till date the situation of the world does not much change. A large section of world population is living in a situation of extreme poverty till now (defined as living on less than \$1.90 a day). The eradication of extreme poverty by 2030 is one of the primary goals of The World Bank. *“Ending extreme poverty by 2030 and boosting shared prosperity are our goals, and we remain committed to them,”* said World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim. He has also said *“At the same time, we can take a broader view of poverty at different levels and dimensions around the world. This view reveals that poverty is more widespread and entrenched, underlining the importance of investing in people.”* (10)

A recent data shows that the share of the world’s population living in extreme poverty fell to 10% in 2015, but the pace of extreme poverty reduction has slowed. There are various measures should have been taken to achieve the goal of eradication of poverty within next decade. A lot of administrative steps should be taken in order to controlling the population specifically in developing countries along with that various financial incentives should be given to them so that they can face the challenge of poverty. Developed nations should play a bigger role in the very context and should come forward to support poor nations in crisis. That is the strong and big hand should come forward to rescue the weaker hands. The balance of equality of distribution of basic resources or needs should be preserved. The world demands it.

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