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SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

CONTRADICTIONARY OR COMPLEMENTARY

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SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

AN INTRODUCTION

Almost unbelievably, the term “social justice” was coined as far back in history as the 1840’s by Sicilian Jesuit Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio, based on the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and has always remained a prominent part of Catholic teaching. In 1891 Pope Leo XIII published the encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of the Working Classes) rejecting both capitalism and socialism while defending labour unions and private property. He stated that society should be based on cooperation and not class conflict and competition. The encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (On the restoration of Social Order) of 1931 by Pope Pius XI, promotes a living wage, subsidiarity, and teaches that social justice is a personal virtue: society can be just only if individuals are just.

It is somewhat disconcerting to note that even while Popes produced encyclicals on social justice as long ago as 1891, in reality, it was the charity approach that prevailed and flourished a la Dickensian workhouses. Society generally, viewed the poor as a lazy, ignorant lot. One might save one’s soul, or prepare one’s path to heaven, by doling out charity to them, but the reasons for their poverty or the question of social justice appears to have rarely

surfaced except in theory and in academic circles.

It is only in the 1970’s that we see the political dimension of poverty resurfacing in the Catholic Church in select circles. Liberation theology emanating from Latin America swept across the thinking church, radicalising and aligning it more closely with Marxian analysis. To be Christian no longer meant doling out charity but tackling, at the root, the social and political structures that caused poverty. Mass movements aimed at changing structures were the order of the day – leading to a polarisation between capitalist thinking seen as conservative and the more radical socialist, Marxist or leftist thinking.

The eighties saw the emergence of a more secular concern for the poor based on an understanding of poverty being caused by “underdevelopment”. Mobilising resources and employing them effectively was seen to be more important than challenging political structures. This gave birth to the “development” approach which dominates the social sector stage till date.

In an attempt to alleviate the suffering of the “underdeveloped”, practitioners of the development approach were quick to realise that if their

interventions were to be sustainable they would have to be underpinned by economic growth – the mantra of development. The dominance of a market economy in the nineties led to a plethora of social enterprises aimed at increasing incomes through better market access. Or a better quality of life through accessing improved health care, education and basic social services. Social enterprise has therefore become an integral part of the development doctrine.

Each of these approaches can lay their own legitimate claim to fame and success. While social justice and development thinking over the years have established themselves and enjoy a fair degree of global recognition, the emerging social entrepreneurship model can neither lay claim to such a history nor to such universal acceptance. While it is growing and attracting popularity, it is still viewed with caution, if not outright suspicion, by those more aligned with the social justice movement. There is a wariness that it is too close to business and free market ideology, too focussed on individuals. Social Entrepreneur adherents on the other hand, tend to dismiss those of the social justice movement as ideologues and idealists, out of touch with the reality of modern society and market economics.

Some complex questions emerge when one looks at the last century and its outcome in terms of the Social Entrepreneurial and development scenario in general.

Why for example did so little happen in terms of the Social Justice Movement even though a figure as important as a Pope produced a radical document as early as 1891? What institutional, cultural, political and economic factors led to their later development?

Charity has always appealed to people whereas justice and its implication of victims and perpetrators of injustice makes people defensive. So while people find comfort in clichés such as the poor will always be with us, they shy away when asked to define justice. The most venal, exploitative, business community in India gives the most donations to charity through religious institutions, even while exploiting adivasis cruelly, or extorting exorbitant interest from starving farmers and labourers.

Fighting for justice has always been a slow, painful uphill task. It invites opposition, criticism and barriers of defensiveness. Every battle for civil liberties, against slavery and colonialism and apartheid was won with blood sweat and tears. It appears to have taken a full century for new insights, criticism of old theory etc to create new changes and new movements to emerge.

Post World War II saw the rise of national movements the world over. Decent people in oppressor countries sided with the anti colonial movements. Slowly liberal thinking won the battle and society in general was forced to acknowledge the wrong, the injustice perpetrated by Western governments on their “colonies”. The spirit of the Independence and civil rights movements, the spread of democratic ideas, influenced movements within countries all over the world.

Communication changed radically and with it the spread of ideas. This was brought to a head by the explosion of information created by instant communication and the internet. Globalisation, a new form of colonialism could be fought effectively by millions who opposed it using the same tools as the oppressors.

It is perhaps inevitable, a natural foregone conclusion, that the battle against poverty which has brought together global players would also come to the conclusion that to fight the onslaught of the capitalist monolith, one should usurp the tools of the trade. And so social entrepreneurship emerged and grabs the benefits of new concepts to make progress where Social Justice has raised barriers.

This is not to debunk the role of Social Justice. It's most tangible victory is perhaps obviously in the jargon used universally, often with little comprehension, in all funding proposals. Donors want “a rights based approach” to be sprinkled liberally on every page of proposals, whether funding environment or the tsunami. We can look at the history and effect of three decades before drawing our conclusions.

In this paper we would like to argue that entrepreneurship is a crucial ingredient contributing to the success of each of these approaches. However, true social entrepreneurship is when these three approaches work in tandem to achieve what Dees describes as “mission related impact”. Drawing on our 30 years of practice with communities, using all three approaches, we attempt to bridge the divide between social justice and social entrepreneurship by putting forward a more inclusive definition of social entrepreneurship that focuses less on individuals and more on their social mission.

We reflect on the three different phases of work that roughly coincided with different decades to demonstrate that social entrepreneurs working together, irrespective of their approach can deliver maximum impact – true and lasting change in a framework of social justice.

THE SOCIAL JUSTICE OF THE SEVENTIES

Universities across the globe were highly politicized places in the early 70's. Students were influenced by the social justice movements of the period – the anti-establishment wave of the 60's, the anti-Vietnam war movement, the civil rights campaign in the US, Liberation theology from South America and the culmination of the student revolution of France. All these provided inspiration and gave students much to think about. We, in India, were not exempt. Thinking Indian students asked themselves why 25 years after Independence so little had changed for the poor. Radicalism was taken to the extreme with the Naxalite or Maoist movement in parts of India.

It was against this background that many students decided to make a commitment to social change, to turn their backs on their privileged bourgeois upbringing and throw in their lot with the poor. People who made this option, believed in going the whole hog, living very simply like the poor, “identifying with the masses” and mobilizing them to fight for their rights. . Influenced by this radical social justice thinking, Stan opted to work with the adivasis of the Ho tribe in South Bihar, now

Jharkhand. The approach adopted was purist '70's ideology. Living with the adivasis to a point where no outsider could tell he was alien, was considered a value in itself. No matter that very little changed for the people – attaining social justice was the long haul, the impossible dream. The struggle to achieve it had to go on. And the suffering associated with this struggle was worn as a badge of honour. Irrespective of the outcome, fighting for and getting people to understand their rights was an end in itself.

Over the years however, there was a disenchantment with the lack of visible change. The fact that hardly a dent had appeared in spite of years of struggle, decades of rhetoric against poverty. Twenty years later, revisiting the area, was a painful experience. So little had changed. If anything the people were poorer than before. With hindsight and two decades of experience, Stan felt a different type of intervention could have drastically changed the Ho peoples' lives.

The disillusionment triggered by the lack of impact on poverty, led to a new kind of thinking in the eighties.

THE DEVELOPMENT APPROACH OF THE EIGHTIES

The seeds for this approach were perhaps laid during the 1977 tsunami-like tidal wave and cyclone that hit the coast of Andhra Pradesh. Thousands of young people volunteered to help with the relief operations. Moved not by political ideology but by simple human compassion. Many stayed on to work on long term rehabilitation – funded by large international aid agencies which had set up shop.

Stan, and a couple of friends, were among those who rushed to help. An introduction to Oxfam and to the civil administration through an old college friend led them to realize that rather than turn their backs on middle class backgrounds which till now had been a political embarrassment, they could instead use it to open doors and access resources for the poor. They set up a small NGO called Volunteers for Andhra Pradesh, mobilized funding and worked on long term rehabilitation in one of the villages on the coast. They experienced first hand, the impact that could be achieved through deploying resources that their middle class backgrounds gave them access to.

Out of the tidal wave a new thinking emerged. That poverty could be tackled by investing heavily in the poor. The '80's saw large sums of money being poured into poverty stricken areas, the belief being, that poverty would not be eradicated through

mass movements and political struggles but through investing in better education, health care and by generating better incomes. "Integrated Rural Development" became the new mantra.

This meant deployment of resources on a very large scale. A scale that not many of the social activists of the seventies could handle. The management of such resources required "professionalisation" of the sector. The earlier breed of activists were dismissed as not being "professional" enough – too impractical and idealistic. And so the early 80's saw a new wave of "Development Professionals" and the emergence of the "third sector" in the form of innumerable non-governmental organizations or NGOs. So the mid-eighties saw the ascendancy and strengthening of the "development" approach. This approach gained in popularity and credibility as the state began to accept the role of what now came to be recognised as non-governmental organisations or the voluntary sector. In India, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, young and eager for a transformation included the NGO sector in many official plans giving it a new respectability and legitimacy. The 7th Five year plan of the Planning Commission of India envisaged the role of NGOs as "complementary to the state" with critical emphasis

on "advocacy" so that these institutions could "act as a link between the government machinery and the masses" and for the first time allocated significant funds for the voluntary sector. The sector justified its appeal for funds from the public and the state on the grounds that it was better placed to alleviate poverty and suffering.

While some groups tended to cling to their purist social justice roots; others jumped on the development band wagon which provided new employment opportunities – no longer the hair shirt approach of the 70s but a more pragmatic and professional approach. Still others – like us – didn't see them as conflicting either or approaches but as being complementary.

This was how we started ACCORD in 1986 – drawing on both the Bihar and AP experience. ACCORD was set up to fight for the land rights of the adivasis of the Nilgiri Hills of Tamilnadu. Mobilising people to take back the land that once was theirs. Pure 70's activist mode.

But very soon we realized that people needed financial help in order to make their newly reclaimed land productive. We learnt that in Madhya Pradesh people who'd fought and won back thousands of acres of land lost it all, because they did not have the means to make it productive or financially viable. Adivasis there lapsed into debt and then bondage, selling the hard won land, making the entire battle an exercise in futility. So after much debate we took on board hitherto shunned development activities. We were slightly embarrassed by this leap into the realm of dirty capitalism, foreign funding, the whole works. But time and again we had seen the pointlessness of land grabs which did not provide a livelihood for the people.

From the outset however we were clear that even if we succeeded in getting back the land, we had to secure it. **We realized it would be fatal to overlook the effects of economic power in securing political purchase.**

We approached it **strategically**. It took a few years of mobilizing, of creating awareness among an entire community that land was THEIR birthright and that if they didn't get back their alienated land, their children would be pauperized and lose any chance of retaining their tribal identity.

The **analysis** was of utmost importance. We knew that after fighting for their land, the community would need to **prove possession legally**. This needed long lasting perennial crops. Only these could provide proof of occupation legally, their size proving indisputably that the person had lived on

the land for the required 12 years. Also, we knew that a community that had been in slavery, bondage and with very little experience of handling money needed a different sort of income. Tea was the perfect crop. It lasted a hundred years, (so a one shot investment), and provided an income fairly soon, after two or three years of planting. It needed relatively little care and most perfect of all, provided a little income every week enough to meet the food needs of a family unlike coffee or pepper which came in a lumpsum and disappeared as fast. Tea was the mainstream economy. The rich planters crop. It enabled us to make a political dream come true. Overnight the adivasis moved from being impoverished landless labourers to "planters" with all the implications of the term. It brought the politics of social justice into a more typical developmental intervention of income generation.

Similarly in health, and education, our task if we'd followed the gospel of social justice would be to mobilize people to fight for their rights. Not start medical or educational interventions. Delivery of basic social services was the government's job, not ours. Yet we decided to compromise because we couldn't sit by and watch women die in childbirth or babies die of dehydration and diarrhoea.

The turning point for us came when three women died in childbirth in a single village Thepakkadu, all in one month. The Thepakkadu story, forced us to make a decision. Did we try to intervene to save the lives of women and children or would we wait for the revolution? We opted to begin a battle for health. A young couple, Drs. Deva and Roopa, just out of medical school joined ACCORD to start the community health work. Here too it was politicised. The health team did not dole out medicines, they talked about why poor nutrition and economics was at the bottom of poor health. The community was involved in the entire process from day one. Health was linked to the sangams (village organizations) and the community chose their health workers.

Getting children to school was the priority after health. We were under pressure to go holistic, that is do economic, health and education programmes together. But we insisted on growing organically, not following the diktat of London based funders but developing at the peoples' pace. This ensured that we worked with their priorities. In the beginning both health and education were based on getting people to access the government services. This was the gospel of development and we tried our hardest. Nothing worked.

THE MARKET ECONOMY OF THE NINETIES

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The fall of the Soviet Union, widely interpreted as a triumph of capitalism, brought the market economy heavily into focus. As more and more states abdicated responsibility and poorer countries became significantly poorer, it became increasingly difficult to fight social justice battles. The era of glasnost and perestroika brought in its wake the World Bank and IMF diktats with country after country falling to restructuring and conditionalities. The poor were asked to tighten their belts as governments obeyed orders to do away with subsidies while industry was given anything it wanted on a platter.

The enemy shifted from the feudal landlord, or a local company to an unseen global enemy, the market. The shift from local production to the global market economy changed the battle lines for the social justice activists totally. "...when they were local wage earners – if a landlord did not pay them a proper wage, we could mobilise a few hundred tribal people to go and grab hold of the employer's collar and demand a fair wage. But when tea prices crash, as they have done in the last few years, whose collar do you grab? Who is this market force? Where do you protest? Where do you try to change things?... (we need to) strive to build a global structure based on the economics of justice."¹

Even the development professionals were forced to accept that a decade of large investments in the poor had produced very little impact. Though these investments had increased productivity at the grassroots, falling prices left people as poor as ever.

This challenge resulted in the emergence of the social enterprise model. The dominance of the market had led those concerned about the poor to look for solutions that are rooted, not in popular or mass movements, not even in the provision of basic services, but in capitalist interventions or enterprise. Exceptions to the rule of the seventies were a few development organisations which initiated various market based interventions. SEWA² in India and the

Grameen Bank in Bangladesh³ are the most well known of these. However, it is only recently that this phenomena has come up for scrutiny and definition.

In the Nineties, ACCORD realised that globalisation was here to stay and that if we didn't do something to help our communities fight back, all the work of the last decade would disintegrate as we watched people slip back into poverty and malnutrition because of the crippled tea industry. We also found that local tradesmen (from whom we thought the adivasis had been liberated) were inventing newer ways to exploit the adivasis. Cheating them on the price of green leaf and during weighing. We then started the Adivasi Tea Leaf Marketing society to break the cycle of exploitation and to give the group the advantage of collective bargaining power.

We were thus able to create a special deal for adivasi tea farmers with Parry Agro, a tea company with a history of being socially responsible. This proved a life saving decision because the extra margin which Parry Agro promised us, kept the community from plunging into despair when all around us was rampant unemployment and plunging prices.

In addition to the financial benefit, the adivasis have radically changed their position in society. They were no longer despised and derided. They had succeeded and done one better than the other more progressive communities. We regard these indicators, more than the financial gains as a real measure of the success of the new experiments in social entrepreneurship. A community which was regarded as backward, with no financial or marketing skills now have trained cadres of young men and women who handle the computers, do the accounts and keep track of complicated financial transactions. There are mistakes and problems but the community sees tangible, visible results and are justifiably proud of their achievement. There has been a huge leap in self esteem and pride.

DISCUSSION:

Much of the debate and discussion on social entrepreneurship tends to revolve around the characteristics of social entrepreneurship, the factors that contribute to its success; and the role and nature of the individual social entrepreneur. While Dees, Brinckerhoff, Thompson and others clearly define and describe the characteristics of the social entrepreneur others like Fowler and Hogg attempt to define social entrepreneurship itself. But the focus tends to remain on the understanding of entrepreneurship in the social sector and how this differs from business entrepreneurship. Dees argues that we need to "... build our understanding of social entrepreneurship on this strong tradition of entrepreneurship theory and research. Social entrepreneurs are one species in the genus entrepreneur" and goes on to describe the difference between social entrepreneurs and business entrepreneurs. The emphasis is more on "entrepreneurship" and less on "social". Seelos and Mair argue that though most definitions use the term "social" this is difficult to define because the term ""social needs" depend on personal and cultural values and individual views of what constitutes "a better world"".

Dees touches upon the purpose of social entrepreneurship when he says "For social entrepreneurs, the social mission is explicit and central. This obviously affects how social entrepreneurs perceive and assess opportunities. Mission-related impact becomes the central criterion, not wealth creation. Wealth is just a means to an end for social entrepreneurs". As does Alvord et al when they state that, "The test of social entrepreneurship, in contrast, (...from business entrepreneurship..) may be a change in the social dynamics and systems that created and maintained the problem..."

But both stop short of defining "the mission related impact", "the end", "the change in social dynamics and systems" or even the "problem" that social entrepreneurship would seek to achieve or address.

Viewed from a perspective of practice rather than a theory we would like to argue that the real value of social entrepreneurship lies not in its characteristics but in its impact. Hence it is equally if not more important to understand the "impact" or "change" as it is to understand the nature of social entrepreneurship.

In the earlier sections we have described how the "social sector" has its roots in the social justice movement. That the concept of a "better world" is rooted in a notion that all people are created equal

and that therefore there are fundamental human rights which when violated results in an unjust or unfair society. Such violations clearly takes place most in societies where there are glaring disparities of rich and poor, powerful and the powerless. Poverty is the unacceptable face of such injustice and disparity. It must therefore be challenged and fought. But the inability to completely eradicate poverty even after years of struggle has led to at least to alleviate the associated suffering through development interventions. If we cannot get down to the causes let us at least deal with the symptoms. With the increasing dominance of neo liberal economics and free market ideology the need for entrepreneurial approaches to poverty alleviation is beginning to gain considerable ground. But whatever the approach and no matter that it might change over time – we must not lose sight of the fact that though the immediate aims of the different approaches may differ the long term goal is the creation of a just society. Even the development school of the 80's has begun to recognise the futility of interventions that are not located within a larger human rights or social justice framework. The true value of Social entrepreneurship must be measured from this perspective – its ultimate contribution to social justice.

This brings us to the issue of "value". Dees rightly claims that "entrepreneurs create value" and that "with business entrepreneurs, wealth creation is a way of measuring value creation. He also rightly, in our opinion, argues that for the social entrepreneur wealth creation is not central. What then does the social entrepreneur create against which we can understand if not measure the value created.

If we apply the notion that social injustice stems from unequal power relationships then the "value creation" can be understood through the creation of power for the powerless. Just as the creation of wealth is the framework in which business entrepreneurs operate, the framework for social entrepreneurship must be empowerment.

This is a much abused word. So we need a clarification. Just as it is not correct to define all new businesses as entrepreneurial it is also not correct to define all entrepreneurial seeming activities in the social sector as Social Entrepreneurship. For example, ACCORD was the first organisation to plant tea for adivasis in India, possibly in the world. This moved them from being landless labourers to tea planters which led to a leap in their status and self esteem. **Here economic power secured political purchase.** The adivasis were not mere beneficiaries. They were owners of a tea nursery which produced

¹ Thekaekara Stan; Alternative Mansion House Lecture, New Economics Foundation

² For e.g: The Self Employed Women's Association was born in 1972 as a trade union of self employed women. It grew out of the Textile Labour Association, TLA, India's oldest and largest union of textile workers founded in 1920 by a women, Anasuya Sarabhai while.

³ The origin of Grameen Bank can be traced back to 1976 when Professor Muhammad Yunus, Head of the Rural Economics Program at the University of Chittagong, Launched an action research project to examine the possibility of designing a credit delivery system to provide banking services targeted at the rural poor

the best plants available. Their plants compared with those of the MNCs. The man in charge was an illiterate adivasi called Bomman. His previous boss came to buy plants and asked Bomman to summon his boss to negotiate a price for a large purchase. Bomman said "I decide about prices". His boss and upper class colleagues couldn't believe this. Bomman was their former lowly coolie, daily wage labourer. But they were forced to negotiate with him. These are what we term defining moments which empower the powerless. Similarly having established the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital as the best in the district, we know the people are proud of THEIR hospital. Drs Shylaja and Nandakumar Menon who started the hospital turned the institution into a political tool for empowering the community. Governance remains with the adivasis. The nurses and 95% of the staff are adivasi. This has changed social equations, considerably improved the self esteem and self image of a battered, traumatised people and empowered them in the truest sense of the word. So while other groups in the Nilgiris have subsequently given out tea plants to poor communities, the poor remain mere beneficiaries. They do not own the process or enjoy power of any kind. The latter interventions do not empower though they might advance the economic status of the individuals in the process.

The bottom line is that just as increased profit is the hallmark of business, empowering the powerless to improve their lives incorporating elements both of social justice as well as economic benefit is crucially important to any definition of social entrepreneurship.

How does the creation of power take place? Our combined experiences of thirty years with communities leads us to the conclusion that for greatest impact it is necessary to combine the different approaches of social justice, development and social entrepreneurship. This is especially crucial if one is aiming for sustainable, irreversible systemic change which would bring justice but also create opportunities for communities to move out of poverty and provide a dignified, decent life for their families. Political power – the ability to influence policy decisions that affect their lives; economic power – that reduces their vulnerability arising out of a dependence on more powerful sections of society for their livelihoods; and social power – that enables them to achieve standards of living that are comparable with those around them; must combine together to create true and lasting change. The real value of social entrepreneurship must lie in such a creation of power for the powerless.

Irrespective of whether one adopts a "mass

mobilisation" and "struggle" approach, or a "development" approach or even a "social entrepreneurship" approach, all of them must be evaluated on the basis of the impact they have in creating a just society. This larger "mission" should act as a unifying force against the apparently divisive differences of the approaches.

This necessarily means that Social entrepreneurship cannot be about the individual – it is about the outcome for communities or groups of marginalised people. Entrepreneurial characteristics in an individual who works in the social sector can be termed social entrepreneurship only when this has led to bringing about a lasting change in society – a change with clearly perceivable social value.

CONCLUSION

Social Entrepreneurship is an idea whose time has come – it is in keeping with the twenty first century, where economics has overtaken politics. Social activists of the 70's have to recognise this. On the other hand the more modern apolitical approaches to poverty rooted in business models have to recognise that creation of wealth even if it is for the poor is not enough. It has to be accompanied by the creation of power. Economic improvement has to go with political empowerment.

In order to do this we have to be more careful in applying the term social entrepreneurship.

We must recognise it as an approach – not as an end. It is an approach that rightly recognises the role of the individual entrepreneur – the initiator, the catalyst, the one with the new idea, the new way of doing things. The Social Justice approach on the other hand, tends to shy away from the individual. And focuses on strategies and techniques for mass mobilisation, often stilted or smothering entrepreneurship in its early stages. It will do well to recognise that individuals also play a key role – so that more effective ways of supporting the individual, of fostering entrepreneurship can be found.

The challenge is to get the balance right - between the individual and the larger community or stakeholders, between the economics and the politics, between social justice and social entrepreneurship.

Dees concludes, "... *entrepreneurs are the change agents in the economy. By serving new markets or creating new ways of doing things, they move the economy forward*".

We would by the same token say that **"social entrepreneurs are the change agents in society – they move society forward."**

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