

MARKETS AND MYSTICS

How They Look at Our Common Heritage, the Mother Earth

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1. Introduction

Brigu was a young man, a beginner with a searching mind, with firm determination to know Brahman. He approached a renowned master (*guru*) and expressed his desire. The *guru* told him that he could not know Brahman from classroom but should perform *tapas*. Here, the word *tapas* means a firm determination to continue the search with a spirit of concentration and readiness to abandon everything else for the sake of what one is searching for. Brigu was very loyal and ready to stick to advice of the master. After the performance of *tapas* for a few days Brigu returned to the master. The master asked: "Who is Brahman?" Brigu answered: "Brahman is food." Here food means the food of all senses. The world is full of food, i.e., the world provides all needed food for all our five senses. This is the cosmic layer of human existence, the outermost layer of our awareness, namely the world awareness. Though this is the most superficial, this is very fundamental, because this is the awareness with which all human beings start living. Sensational food is the first stage of our awareness. But the human being is expected to go deeper in awareness. Hence, the master told him: "you need some more *tapas*." True to his nature, Brigu returned to perform *tapas*. After a few weeks the boy came back. The master once again asked the same question: "Who is Brahman?" This time Brigu replied: "Brahman is life." Brigu has made progress. He has moved from the outermost layer to the next inner layer. The shift from food to life is a shift from object to

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subject. But in this stage this, in fact, is only an awareness of bodily life. The Sanskrit word for this life is *prāṇa*, the breath. All breathing beings, including insects (*prāṇi*) have this sort of life. In other words, Brigu's awareness is not very deep. It has to go further. Therefore, the master told him: "you should continue your *tapas*." Brigu continued and came back for the third time with a new answer to the question, Who is Brahman? This time he said: "Brahman is mind." Of course, mind gives you ideas. Brigu has moved from the bodily world to the mental world. Though idea is wonderful and capable of moving our mind to higher ideals, the master sent him for further *tapas*. Two times more Brigu came back with two new discoveries about Brahman. He said: "Brahman is wisdom and bliss," respectively. The *guru* sent him again. But Brigu never returned.¹

I introduce this story only to illustrate where our business world remains and what does it miss. Brigu's first answer is that food is Brahman. This shows that his Brahman-consciousness is very shallow at this stage. But as mentioned earlier, this is the foundation for all further awareness. The first three layers, which Brigu presents, are our human layers, the cosmic, the biological, and the mental. Our market world remains largely within these layers, especially in the first that is the layer of food for all sense faculties. But Brigu did not stop there. He made his search further and brought forward two more key concepts of our deeper realization that is a higher wisdom and a bliss emerging from that. This wisdom is not a mental product, but a response to a new light from God who abides within everyone. Faith or *śradha* is this inner light. It brings along with it an a-cosmic delight because of his closeness to and union with the divine Self, which we in India call *Ātman*, the innermost Self. In Christian parlance, this is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, abiding within us, teaching us, and leading us to the depth of the divine truth. Brigu is now a mystic. From a luxurious market-world, Brigu has now entered a world of mysticism. Hence, the title, "Markets and Mystics."

2. Globalisation, a Way to the Emergence of the Market World

Anything in the world can be looked at from different perspectives. I propose to focus our attention on two ways of looking at a thing. Think of birds in the air. I can look at it with a commercial eye. I catch them or

¹*Taitirīya Upaniṣad*, III.1-6.

collect them, multiply them and sell them. Profit is my main motive. In this world the bird becomes an object of my commercial interest. The birds, those are so lovely, and freely flying in the air, practically doing no harm to anyone, now become a business commodity. They are caught, slaughtered and sold in the market. Globalisation makes any item in the world available anywhere. But it looks at everything with a commercial eye, which in most instances lack a contemplative gaze.

Seen from this perspective, the word 'globalisation' apparently brings a glad tiding that our world of every day life is going to be of universal dimension, far more than merely international. But this good news may not last long when we come to grip with the reality of globalisation. This is because the new world promised by the promoters of the globalisation process does not take us beyond this globe that is our earth, nor does it care very much about the spirit within us, which really makes us what we are and is the basis of our natural tendency towards transcendence, promoting us to rise above all limitations.

Globalisation does not promise a heavenly world on earth. It only gives us a commercial world of bitter bargain, where the mightier is always the better and the winning partner. As regards the unequal partners the picture is not that bright as it is made out in the propaganda, largely carried out by the mightier and the logical winners in this global game.

3. Globalisation, a Way to the Eclipse of the Mystical World

In contrast to the commercial look, the same birds can be looked at from a different angle. In this case, economic profit is not the prime objective. The untarnished beauty of nature is looked at with no desire to possess or manipulate. In this art of looking at the things of the world, they are not made objects of the manipulative mind of human beings, rather they are looked upon with awe and reverence, as all of them in one way or other reflect the divine from whom they have been originated. This contemplative gaze gives us delight and never takes us to the market world but to a world of communion with not only other human beings but with the entire creation. They all together make one house and delicately tend to keep an ecological balance within the universe. Jesus looked at the birds of the air in this way and said: "Look at the birds flying around: they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns; yet your father in

heaven takes care of them! Aren't you worth much more than birds?" (Mtt. 6:26). In saying this Jesus asks us to see the mystery aspect hidden in the bird and raise our hearts to the providential care of God our heavenly father. The little birds in the air have tremendous power to raise our hearts to God. When you look at the world of birds in this way, you create a lovely relation with those creatures; consider them 'holy' as they raise your hearts to God. You are slowly leaving the world of market and entering the world of mysticism. Mystics move from the outer three layers to the inner layers where the Divine communicates with its own peculiar language of light (wisdom) and delight (bliss). As cosmic layer brings forth food for senses and the mind so also the inner divine Self pours forth the divine food to the soul. The mystics find delight as the outer layers unfold and reveal the hidden symbols of the divine contained in them.

One of the greatest harms brought about by globalisation is that it transforms the world into a global market, not a community of friendly nations. With globalisation we have only markets, huge super- and hypermarkets, where everything is available to those who can afford. Market does not give us a friendly world to live in, but promotes competition and consumerism. We know that in railway station there is a large crowd of people moving around but we do not call it a community. In market every item is looked upon as a market commodity, something to be bought and enjoyed. It is a mere external or ephemeral, pragmatic or a material way of looking at things. Market value is only one aspect of our human life. Of course, human life needs things, commodities, consumer items, etc. But in the globalisation of the world into a market-world we forget many sublime values, which should shape and remain at the foundation of our lives. Things in the world also have many more dimensions to be contemplated upon.

This mystery aspect is totally forgotten when we convert our world into a market-world. Our relation to the things must be much more symbolic and have deeper relation from an existential point of view. True spirituality would prefer to look at things placed at our disposal for the creation of a more humane, a more heavenly world on this earth.

Globalisation, because it looks at the world only from the perspective of commercial interest, the unseen yet ennobling dimension of beings is completely neglected. If our mindset is, thus, ill formed, naturally it will

affect our value system, because values are always dependent on our level of consciousness. This takes us to the problem of business ethics.

4. Ethical Considerations

A. Consumerism: Riches to the Rich and Misery to the Poor

Consumerism does not offer anything substantially to the poor villages of India or Asia. The items that are imported from abroad are either sophisticated things like computer or expensive consumer items like Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, Kentucky Chicken, etc. In fact, these items are not necessary for the well being of the villagers in India nor are they affordable to them. The vast majority of the Indian people still live in villages and the main source of their income is agriculture.

TABLE 1
Indian Population and Settlements

According to the censuses of 1991 by Govt. of India: Total Population	846,302,688 (846 millions +)
Rural	628,691,676 (628 millions +)
Urban*	217,611,012 (217 millions +)
Total Population of India, today	1 Billion + (1000 millions +)

The above table indicates that more than two-third of the population lives in the villages. The rural population lives mainly on agricultural products. Though they are in need of good drinking water, it is still not provided in all villages. The recent studies sponsored by UN have placed India in 120th place in providing good drinking water to the people. Instead, you can see advertisement of Coca-Cola/Pepsi-Cola and other luxury items in these villages or, at least, in all mini-towns in their vicinity. Most of the poor people can only see it, not drink it. In order to understand the reason

behind this phenomenon, we have to see, for example, the cost of Coca-Cola in comparison with the cost of some items of daily need.

TABLE 2
Pepsi/Coca-Cola versus Train Journey
A Comparison

A glass of Pepsi/Coco-Cola	Rs. 10
45 kilometres train journey in India	Rs. 10
110 kilometres train journey in India	Rs. 20
45 kilometres train journey in Germany	Euro 3.6 = Rs. 205.00

The table indicates that the money an Indian has to pay for a glass of Pepsi or Coca-Cola is far higher than his or her normal purchasing power! Moreover, the question we should pose, from an ethical point of view, is "How does this help a poor villager in India?"

An average Indian wage earner gets Rs. 70.00 per day. More skilled labourer, e.g., carpenter gets higher wages (i.e., around Rs. 200.00). A plate of Kentucky chicken (2 pieces of chicken, a slice of bread and 1 glass of Cola) costs Rs. 70.00, whereas one plate of Indian *Biryani* (an Indian spicy rice preparation) with two pieces of chicken in an ordinary restaurant costs only Rs. 25.00. This gives us an idea how expensive are some of the consumer items brought down to India by globalisation.

B. The Asian Markets: A Road between Profit and Poverty

Why so much euphoria and enthusiasm for globalisation in the Asian countries? This is a relevant question. The upper and the upper middle class society in these countries make this enthusiasm and propaganda. They have money at their disposal either from ancestral wealth or from highly paying jobs or business establishments related to modern IT technology. They do not even constitute, at the most, 20% of the

population of most Asian countries today. In India, this would amount to two hundred million, i.e., 20% of one billion plus. It is interesting to note that this 20%, i.e., the upper and upper middle class of India, together would make the population of two or three countries in Europe.

TABLE 3
The Upper and Middle Class of Indian People

Total Population of India, today	1 Billion + (1000 millions +)
The upper and upper middle class	200 millions +
Population of Germany (UNO Publication, 1997)	82,19000 (82 millions +)
Population of France	58,542,000 (58 millions +)
Germany + France	140,732,000 (140 millions +)
20% of Indian population (the upper and the upper middle) is more than the total population of these two countries.	

So, the multinationals are interested in the Asian markets and to invest millions of dollars in Asian countries, provided conditions are in favour of their interests. For them, Asia is a ready market, which they can take advantage without as many hurdles as they have to overcome in many a western country. The interest of the multinationals centres mostly on the 20%, and lack any concern for or commitment in the betterment of the living standards of the rest of the populace. So, ultimately, globalisation does not intend the uplift of the people, but the uplift and safeguarding of the business interests of the multinationals alone.

There may be poor people in Germany, France, the European Union, or even in the USA. But the basic needs of such people, such as drinking water, minimum housing facility, etc., are mostly taken care of. This is the big difference between the people in the Southern and Northern part of our globe.

C. Globalisation: A Threat to Local Identity, Culture and Values

Another problem which globalisation brings about is the extinction of local identity, culture and varieties. We have to see this problem vis-à-vis the threat of rising ethnicity and fundamentalism in the modern world. Particularity, ethnicity and identity are aspects of human life, which need adequate recognition. Too much of foreign domination is detrimental to the healthy safeguarding of any good tradition. One reason for the rise of unhealthy fundamentalism and undue emphasis on ethnic identities is reaction against totalitarian sweep of any dominant culture from outside, e.g., from the West in the East. At the same time, a healthy interaction of cultures and an organic growth of indigenous cultures are always welcome. To strike a healthy balance in these will be sometimes difficult, because of the consumerist tendency of the people, especially of the rich who can afford to it, and of the profit-making tendency of the market world. Those who possess money want to possess more and tend to have the world economy under their control as far as possible. For the rich consumers, their greed is made out to be their need. In the thrust of their pushing the world market forward they may weaken or even destroy some of the healthy traditions and well-preserved pluralism in the world. Here I would like to bring to your attention a conversation a social activist had with a Coca-Cola seller: "Are you afraid of Pepsi-Cola as a potential rival?" The activist asked. The dealer of Coca-Cola answers: "No, we are used to compete each other and we know how to do it. But we are afraid of the local drinks now available in India, such as a glass of lemon water with ice for Rs. 2.00 or Rs. 3.00." What we see in our own country is slowly the local drinks such as lemon juice are disappearing and the chemical-rich, ready-made drinks of multinationals are thriving.

D. Universality and Local Culture

True universality must be rooted in deep awareness of the local and national cultures. Otherwise the future generations will have to meet resurgence of fierce fundamentalism from the extremist groups. Taliban in Afghanistan and some sections of hard-core promoters of Hindutva ideology in India are glowing examples of the same. The poor countries of the East have kept up a variety of bio-diversity of grains, medicinal plants and natural spices. This is a great wealth these countries offer to the rest

of the world. Genetically manipulated seeds and medicinal products are coming back to the country promising abundant harvest, which, as their manufacturers – multinationals – claim, could eventually solve the food or health problems of Asia. The golden rice is an example. The result will be that the Indian farmers will eternally remain dependent on these multinational companies to get the seeds they need to cultivate the next cycle of crops. If the farmers start using that they will eventually forget the present way of re-generating the crops from the seed they have preserved, and after a few years of instant boon they would be left at the mercy of the sellers who are great multinationals and whose main interest is not feeding the poor of India but amassing wealth for their own companies, and to siphon it out of the country for ever.

More necessary things conducive to better health, which are generally expensive, should be brought to the market for reasonably affordable prices to the people. Hence, multinationals should come forward to put up small scale factories to purify and preserve nationally produced healthier food stuffs, such as lemon, pineapple, orange, mango, etc., which grow only in tropical countries. The providential arrangement is that God allows the needed fruit items for the people to be grown in the country they are in. A tropical country means much warmer climate and cooler drinks are always very attractive. What really happens is, instead of developing the products of the country into commercial market for cheaper prices, globalisation imports products of the richer countries, naturally, for higher prices. The high-profile propaganda mechanism (e.g., the name-boards of many shops in India carry catchy advertisements of the products of well-placed companies, with only a little space allotted to the name of the shop) mesmerizes the people in such a way that within a short period of time, the Western products become a status symbol in the society. Perhaps, this is a problem that the government of each country should take care of rather than the nations abroad.

E. Indian Medicines and International Patent

At present India has good medicines and their prices are rather affordable. I am apprehensive of what is going to happen to our indigenous medicinal world as a result of the widespread globalisation. Will new brands of expensive medicines from the West with patent claims flood the country,

though some of them are based on the medicinal plants traditionally grown in the tropical countries and on the medical-knowledge handed over to the people as a free, sacred trust? Intellectual property claims make things exorbitantly expensive for the common people in India. For example, a traditional medicine for jaundice such as a single doze of medicinal leaves with strict diet control for a few days offers perfect cure. Suppose a western company designs a drug or a capsule out of these leaves and the know-how of the village people, it suddenly becomes an intellectual property right of that company for which the people who were the depositories of this medical-knowledge, and had identified and maintained those medicinal plants and the bio-diversity for over thousands of years have to pay a high price with practically nothing in return; the depository, now being a patient, turns out to be an eternal dependent of the commercial interest of the multinationals! That constitutes the new dynamics of the all-pervasive globalisation tactics. The patent rights of Basmati Rice, Neem Tree, etc., were matters of heated discussion in this country. To be honest, I am not an economist either to address or answer these questions. Yet, I am looking at the whole thing from a human as well as a spiritual point of view, where values other than profit and increase of material/monetary wealth are also to be taken into account.

In the new world of global markets, each country should have freedom: freedom to ban certain items which are not very necessary for a happier life and not conducive to better health, and freedom to import things that are really needed for the overall development of the country. Of course, they will import other needed items. This freedom must be given to all nations. This would mean that there would be room to develop their own local products, enhance local markets, with shared intelligence, if necessary even from abroad, but keeping the product as a national one and, thus, maintaining the variety, multiplicity and diversity in the world. Globalisation easily robs or wipes away many aspects of bio-diversity, which we are now enjoying from the not yet extinct bountiful nature. They are already in a risk and people are beginning to murmur against a kind of consumeristic culture that begins to pervade our culture, ethos and life style.

5. From the World of Global Markets to a Whirlpool of Universal Love

We have to move from the jaws of consumerism to the hearts of universal love. In the market world it is the consumer item that moves globally. This movement is neither deeper nor higher, but horizontal. The so-called global world is not the world of universal love, but of the availability of the market item, and that too only to those who can afford it. The vast majority of the poor people can only look at it, and even if one wants to enjoy one good meal for all members of the family, he/she has to pay almost all he/she earns one day. On the contrary, if we look at the world and its wealth with an eye of mystical love, our world is totally different. Every item speaks to us the providential love of God, the loving God placing everything at the disposal of humanity, as he placed the human beings in the paradise after creating everything for them (Gen. 1:26). The mystics look at the world or the Mother Earth and all that the earth produces from this perspective. They see God, his loving face, in everything.

This earth is (like) honey for all creatures, and all creatures are (like) honey for this earth. This shining, immortal person who is in this earth and with reference to oneself, this shining, immortal person who is in the body, he, indeed, is just this Self. This is immortal, this is *Brahman*, this is all.²

Mystics love everything, without any desire to possess them for themselves. All things are symbols to be meditated upon, and the symbolized is in them. Mystics, therefore, make an inward journey and discover the author of the universe in their own selves. "He is the unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the un-thought thinker, the unknown knower. There is no other seer than he, no other hearer than he, no other thinker than he, no other knower than he. He is your Atman, the inner controller, the immortal."³ "It is only by seeing, hearing, thinking about, and deeply meditating upon the Atman that all this is known."⁴

St. Francis of Assisi saw the Lord's face in everything and exclaimed: "My God is my all." The sages and saints have always looked

²*Br̥hdh̥r̥anyaka Upaniṣad*, II.5.1.

³*Br̥hdh̥r̥anyaka Upaniṣad*, III.7.23.

⁴*Br̥hdh̥r̥anyaka Upaniṣad*, II.2,4,4-5.

at the world not from outside but from inside. They evolve a different kind of global consciousness, a heart full of universal love, enfolding all humanity and all the creatures of the universe. It is consciousness that becomes universal, and the personal desire to possess and consume becomes minimal. This does not, however, mean that they do not want food or shelter. They do need. But they find their basic happiness in a profounder consciousness they have developed, embracing all living beings and everything created. They contain the whole universe within themselves and yet possess nothing! They are people who have understood the real value of things. The real value of things, which is not just the momentary or consumerist, is the representative value that the things unfold to us. The earth produces fruits and does not keep them for itself, but places them at the disposal of all. It is the craving for possessiveness that makes them one's own (i.e., ownership claims), deprives others from communal sharing, and makes an ego-centred world of bitter bargain, beggary and, ultimately, poverty and misery.

On the other hand, the true human happiness does not consist in the accumulation of things. Global accumulation does not make the human beings internally happy. It is the spirit, God's own power and the consciousness within us, which make us ultimately and permanently happy. This spirit, as the unique union of the Father and the Son, Being and Consciousness, opens up from our own interior centre where he abides as fullness of power, joy and peace. In India, we understand this abiding Spirit as *Saccidānanda*.

The experience of *Saccidānanda* carries the soul beyond all merely intellectual knowledge to her very centre, to the source of her being. Only there is she able to hear the Word which reveals within the undivided unity and *advaita* of *Saccidānanda* the mystery of the Three Divine Persons: in *sat*, the Father, the absolute Beginning and Source of being; in *cit*, the Son, the divine Word, the Father's Self-knowledge; in *ānanda*, the Spirit of love, Fullness and Bliss without end.⁵

Mystics are those who go in search of this inward source of unending happiness. For this sake they abandon everything (*sannyāsa*), opt the life of a wandering monk. They have a heart containing the whole universe

⁵Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, Delhi: ISPCCK, 1974, 178.

from which breaks forth the divine love, which flows incessantly to others. Here sharing is without fear, because the source is everlasting resourcefulness.⁶ "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn. 4:13-14). In this level of consciousness, everything one possesses is possessed for the other and is spontaneously shared with the other. A communitarian consciousness that fosters love and concern for the other is the net result of this abiding awareness. But the lady who heard the words of Jesus was on the outer level, the food layer of consciousness, and, hence, asked Jesus to give her this water that she may not come to draw water from the well. The same type of a fallacy we make when we think our satisfaction is from the world of markets not from the unending abundance that wells up from our own depth where God abides. Such awareness makes us happy and leads us to the creation of a new world where selfless love and mutual sharing become spontaneous and natural.

The international weekly *Time* has recently published a study on happiness. Typical to the nature of the secular studies it depends on empirical data for its discoveries. However, the study brings out certain valid points. The basic question is "What makes us happy?" 1. Wealth? No; once your basic needs are met other luxuries of life do not add very much to the growth of your happiness. 2. Education? Sorry, No; neither education nor high IQ paves the road to happiness. 3. Youth? No, again; the study shows that older people are happier, they are more consistently happy than the youth. 4. Marriage? Yes, they are happier than the single; but not necessarily lasting. Sharing bodily presence alone does not make us happy. It is union of consciousness that matters. 5. Watching TV? Not at all; people who watch TV for a long period of time constitute an unhappier lot. 6. Religious faith? Yes, "religious faith seems genuinely to lift the spirit; whether it is the God part or community aspect" does this is not certain. However, in either case it is union of hearts that makes us happy. For maintaining steady happiness, "it is important to work on

⁶"That is fullness, this is fullness / From fullness springs forth fullness / Fullness is taken of from fullness / Fullness alone remains. / Om Peace, Peace, Peace!" *Bṛh̄dhāranyaka Upaniṣad*, V.1.1

social skills, close interpersonal ties to friends and family and spending time with them.”⁷

Seen from this perspective our global markets do not make us necessarily happy. Human happiness needs deeper dimensions. Only communion of hearts will make us happy. Two Greek words, extensively used in the Christian spiritual literature, which express the true nature of love, are very important here, *agape* and *koinonia*, a love to share what I possess with the other and a communion of hearts. Markets cannot give us this, but mystics can.

Once the Divine Spirit as the abiding Self is discovered in the depth of our own being, we see this Spirit operating everywhere. Spirit is like wind and it moves through all and controls all. Meditation brings about expansion of consciousness, just like it works out the deepening of our self-awareness. In striking contrast to the globalisation movement, where material things are made globally accessible, here it is the Spirit within us which becomes more and more cosmic, enfolding humanity and its universe in a joyful embrace of love and self-giving. We should remember the truth that matter has an inherent tendency to divide, whereas Spirit, by nature, has a tendency to unite. What we need in the world is an undivided humanity held together by the power of the Spirit where all are free, loving, self-giving and caring for one another.

He who dwells in all beings, yet is other than all beings, whom no beings know, whose body is all beings, who controls all beings from within, he is your Self, the inner controller, the immortal.⁸

This spiritual unitary vision of the world, held together in Christ, is very well expressed by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians. Paul unites all human beings as well as the universe they live in, into the one vision of Christ, who's Spirit abides in every one of us.

Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God. He is the first-born Son, superior to all created things. For through him God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and unseen thing, including spiritual powers, lords, rulers and authorities. God created

⁷ Claudia Wallis, "The New Science of Happiness," *Time*, February 28, 2005, 31-36.

⁸ *Br̥hadh̥āraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, III.7.15.

the whole universe through him and for him. Christ existed before all things, and in union with him all things are in their proper place (Col. 1:15-17).

6. Conclusion

Our world is moving in two directions. One is to the enhancement of the outer layers of our humanity. This will include the cosmic commodities, the global availability of them to the mighty and the wealthy, and the creation of a utopia on the earth. This brings affluence, amenities of life, and mega-dimensions of consumerist beatitude to the economically affluent. But, like the prodigal son of the parable of Jesus, sooner or later, people begin to feel the disturbing cry of the inner vacuum which may, eventually, lead to despair, depression, and meaninglessness of life amidst the expected paradise on the earth, especially as this is a life exclusively given to market values.

On the other hand, the mystics take a different turn. Setting their heart and soul not on the pleasure paradise, they continue their search inwardly, finding the unending resourcefulness of meaning, mystery and divine wealth within. Their consciousness grows globally, embracing all, loving all, which specially includes the poor and the marginalized. Indeed, the mystic needs minimum food and a little space to live in.

In this time of ridiculous extravaganza of the rich and the grinding poverty of the poor, we need to strike a balance between unbounded affluence of the mighty and the perennial poverty of the needy.