

TOWARDS A HUMANISTIC ECONOMICS: THE ROLE AND RELEVANCE OF JAIN PRINCIPLES

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Abstract

The pandemic Covid-19 has brought about a revolutionary change in the global outlook in diverse aspects of human life. One of the most significant and momentous opportunities it has bestowed on the humankind is to bring about a breakthrough in the basic concept of economics to mould the whole framework of modern economics and also to create anew the most modern module of economics to end the hazards of present-day scenario threatening total doom of the global life. Such module would be the 'Humanistic Economics' would prove itself to be a divine boon to the entire humankind, overcoming the apparently invincible bestial instinct of greed present in the human brain.

Introduction

The Covid-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic has taught a big lesson to all, irrespective of their economic affluence, geographic locations and political leanings. According to a report (Ahmed) by OXFAM¹, the recent research papers confirm that the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest in the society has grown enormously during the pandemic. The gist of the report is that the wealth of 10 richest men has doubled since the pandemic began; for 99% of the global population, incomes have fallen and over 160 million more people have been forced into poverty. According to the experts, who were involved in the research, the economic inequality and economic violence are mainly responsible for the tragic situation.

The Jain philosophy which fundamentally emphasises *ahimsā*, *anekānta* and *aparigraha*, furnishes powerful clues to resolve the economic inequality and economic violence by the application of the concept of *aṇuvrata* given by Mahāvīra. But the perverted view (*mithyā darśana*) prevailing in modern times as regards materialistic lifestyle and lopsided concept of development, is to be first abandoned so that the instinct of greed, which has created many inequalities, could be diluted at least to that extent which is inevitable for development of new model of humanistic economics.

The opportune moment for the right lessons

The situation created as a result of the coronavirus hitting the globe had been so acute that the oxygen which is otherwise a nature's gift to the mankind granting the basic element of survival had suddenly become the single most precious commodity during the pandemic. Something as basic as oxygen defined the ultimate in luxury – no price was too high to save a

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¹ Oxford Committee for Famine Relief founded in Britain in 1941 focusing on the alleviation of Global Poverty.

loved one who was gasping for breath, for those privileged enough who had the money to pay up. As against this, at the same time, real luxury buying existed in a parallel universe wherein inhabitants float in a cloud named desire. Going by the luxury index that tracks all things bright and beautiful across continents, the more expensive articles had topped charts with phenomenal rise in sales being most wanted and desired items on shopper's list worldwide including jewellery, watches, classic cars, works of art etc. It became apparent that on one side, while the commoners were fighting for their life-saving drugs, the pandemic did not dampen the enthusiasm of luxe-obsessed people who crave big-ticket buyings. Nearly every vendor of gourmet foods had done brilliantly well during the pandemic shrewdly figuring it was the ideal times for the people to pamper themselves who have plentiful of money to spend in artisanal things (De). Is this situation not alarming? This pandemic is much about learning the right lessons as much as it is about not learning the wrong ones. It is like sensing that over the pandemic, high flying individuals have experienced the fragility of life and want to celebrate their time to the most as if 'you only live once'.

Priority in global initiatives

Kristalina Georgieva (Managing Director of IMF), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (Director General of WHO), David Malpass (President of World Bank Group) and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Director General of WTO) have, on behalf of these four globally renowned organisations, jointly estimated investing an amount of US \$50 billion to end the pandemic and called for a new level of international support for a stepped up coordinated strategy to handle this unprecedented scenario; that will hopefully accelerate the economic recovery and generate some US \$9 trillion in additional global output by 2025. Investing such huge amounts of public money to end the pandemic is not that simple. Pandemic is a solvable problem that requires global action, and the priority is to implement such action plan. (Georgieva, et.al)

The above proposition needs a critical scrutiny. There is no doubt that this proposed investment is a noble and timely initiative. But it cannot be ruled out that the pandemic is the result of self-centered agenda by those who had malicious intent to control the major resources around the globe or exhibit their political might or corporate ambitions of powerful organisations and also the desire for excessive possessiveness of the people at large. If, in the first place, the global leaders, who influence the environmental and political will, had no callous intent of amassing or controlling the global power, then in such a situation the pandemic probably would not have occurred and would have not only saved millions of lives, but also spared the above projected US \$50 billion in spending hoping to control the pandemic. If human-centric benevolence was practised, the same amount could have been utilized in the welfare activities of the people world over that would have led to a positive environment, if only those few, responsible for creating this pandemic, were not blinded by utter selfishness and unrestrained greed. It is high time that blunders must be admitted and rectified to give exemplary performance in times to come. Hopefully, that becomes the mantra henceforth, in order to avoid repeated occurrences of such havoc and avoid facing such gigantic challenges. Between the years 2012-30, it is expected India will have had an

economic loss of US \$4.6 trillion due to non-communicable diseases. If there is one silver lining from Covid-19, it is that health has become a high priority for all citizens and a concern for the government to act appropriately and has given everyone the opportunity to change. This is like the UK where National Health Scheme (NHS) was born in the post-world-war era to reimagine healthcare services (Bansal).

Eric Budish, Professor of Economics at Chicago University's Booth School of Business, in his new research with a team of collaborators led by Michael Kremer, on managing Covid-19 pandemic said that the global economy had suffered enormously during the pandemic with costs in four major dimensions – economy, health, human capital and social happiness. His key element in the findings is that the global monthly harm of the pandemic is about one trillion dollars. That is based on IMF and World Bank estimates of GDP loss at six billion dollars per year. Conservative estimates find that if one adds health, human capital and lost utility, that doubles the loss. Other estimates find that these factors even increase the economic loss to one trillion dollars per month (Das). Such are the devastating outcomes of just one virus never seen before!

The right time to rethink

Whether the coronavirus was man-made and had leaked from a laboratory or was a result of outbreak on zoonotic transmission from live animals being sold in wet markets or based on a natural emergence theory, the cardinal question remains as to why and how the virus reaches humans via pangolin and with what intentions, since its treatment vaccine being available out in the market well before the virus itself hit the streets. The result as of now is that it has not only resulted into recorded casualty of over 5.7 million (as on 04/02/2022) world over and still counting, but also hundreds of millions out of work and trillions of dollars in economic damages. The chief presidential medical advisor, Anthony Fauci, has told the US Congress that he believed the most likely scenario was that this was a natural occurrence, but no one knew that 100% for sure (Chanda). It is hard to believe that the virus would have evolved naturally, since there are no credible ancestors of the virus ever known. This is like the Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 believed to be lost in the Indian Ocean on 8th March 2014 and no one knowing what happened on board that resulted in the death of all 239 passengers and also the crew while the black box still untraceable. It may be another unresolved modern mystery with no clues about the Covid-19 origins unless there are repeated efforts to find out the truth, whether a conspiracy or a lab leak accident without proper safety protocols in place. Howsoever, the human deaths are colossal, and the economic losses are massive, compelling a rethink on the way the selfish intentions hold for mankind's survival in the future. This all points to the greed as the mother of all evils.

Shameful mockery

Experts world over are seriously busy zeroing-in on the reasons and the reasoning behind the occurrence of the pandemic with the blame-game exchanging amongst countries, not sparing even the WHO. The bigger and the most vital issue is – what next to follow, even if the

reasons are found out and the truth comes out in the public? The consequences of the pandemic are not only apparent but also borne by almost all individuals across the globe, hitting so very hard that the damages suffered and the havoc created will keep chasing the humankind for long. The pages of history are full of similar rather more severe occurrences of their times in terms of casualties like plague, influenza, cholera, malaria, tuberculosis, smallpox and so on and so forth, but alas! all of that appears to have settled between the books with passage of time. For the present, we too are ourselves bearing the brunt of the havoc-in-hand. No one can disagree that the occurrences of such magnitude are disastrous and recurring albeit with a sufficient time gap for us to mend our ways but can safely assert that they are sporadically continuing to happen on a very longer time-space horizon. It is only in the present times that Covid-19 pandemic is observable by us and thus apparent, while similar disasters in the past have occurred but only escape our attention now, not that they did not happen or that Covid-19 is the first such occurrence. Pandemics were prevalent in every epoch in the recorded history of human civilization. For example, in 1918, there was Spanish flu recorded to have killed 50 million people. It is the guilty conscience of human beings which is responsible for our exploitation of the earth, pollution of the atmosphere and over-consumption of resources.

Not only the scientists, experts and world bodies but also the religious heads have been warning us repeatedly to pay heed to environmental concerns, climate changes, global warming, pollution issues and other aspects for a long time, but all such words of wisdom have fallen on deaf ears. Such neglecting attitude is one of the main causes responsible for surfacing of hazards & casualties, and sovereign wars too. On the contrary, most of the nations have only supported industrialization, wealth creation sans purity of means, irresponsibly cornering of earth's limited resources which are all lopsided engagements to gain ultimate supremacy in the global market.

Time-wheel

The Jain cosmology has elaborately discussed the theory of time, which is quite relevant in the context of the modern scientific theory in general and furnishes us with the plausible causes responsible for natural catastrophes, pandemics or other calamities occurring in cyclic manner in the world. In this context, it is to be borne in mind that during the semi-cycle of ascending time, the natural phenomena ever continue to become more and more congenial, favourable and progressive for the human world, whereas on the contrary, during the other counterpart, i.e., the descending semi-cycle, exactly the opposite transformation takes place (See: chapter 2 of *Jambūdvīpaprājñpti*).

The present time is believed to be approximately the climax of descending semi-cycle and termed as *duṣamā* epoch i.e., the miserable section of time-wheel. Its duration is 21,000

years. It means that there will be a gradual deterioration in human life with respect to happiness, peace, health and so on and so forth.²

From this we may conclude that the planet Earth does not need humans to survive, actually it is humans who need the earth to survive. In other words, it can be said that the very presumption that we can spoil or improve the earth or should save the earth is nothing but sheer outcome of human ego and our own over estimation that we are so powerful. According to some hypothetical findings, the disturbances caused by the outer space research might have caused the eruption of such viruses like Corona and the resulting disastrous pandemic occurring all over the world simultaneously. This theory needs validation.

Although the above concept prima-facie is quite pessimistic and hence may demoralize human efforts to fight against the onslaught of natural time effect, one should not lose sight of the principle of *puruṣārtha* (exertion made by the Soul through exercising free will) prescribed in the Jain philosophy which clearly mentions that right action is competent even to defy the natural deteriorating effects of time-wheel. In this context, what ought to be paid attention to, is to utilize the human rational power by strengthening it with the wisdom which undoubtedly shows us the way to minimize the deteriorating effect of the time-wheel.

Herein one should evaluate the significance of minimalism which is the golden path to win over at least the calamities or pandemics caused by our own follies emanating from infatuation.

Greed – the culprit

One cannot overlook the motivation coming out of the element of greed which is a natural human instinct, that helps in fiscal progress and economic development. However, such lopsided self-interest based on mere materialistic achievements would not help mankind perennially. For, without space for congenial interpersonal relations, humanistic social considerations and global understanding with respect to more important issues like compassion, emotions and ethical values, badly needed for peaceful co-existence world over, we, the humans would become more and more bestial in our behavior, inviting the ultimate doom to occur much earlier than destined by the effects of descending time-cycle. Is it not ironical that on one hand, we boast of unprecedented scientific and technological achievements in human history, while on the other hand, we succumb to our own destructive emotions including greed, cruelty, jealousy, utter selfishness and lust for sensuality, ultimately ignoring all the warnings of the scientists as well as the great teachers of spiritual technology?

The sheer imagination of death toll caused by Covid-19 pandemic so far (and still counting) is hair-raising apart from those dying due to other reasons like poverty, hunger, suppression,

² “...aṇantehiṃ vaṇṇapajjavehiṃ taheva jāva parihaṇṇe parihaṇṇamāṇe ettha ṇaṃ dūsamāṇaṃ samā kale paḍivajjissai samaṇāuso | ...Ekkavīsāe vāsasahashehiṃ kale viikkamṇe aṇantehiṃ... dūsamadūsamāṇāmaṃ samā kale paḍivajjissai samaṇāuso |” (*Jambūdvīpaprājñapti* 45-46)

medical insufficiency or other man-made circumstances. If an attempt is made to map the perennial reason, one and the only one leading factor to come to the forefront will be the human passion called Greed. Greed that may be imagined as a micro-virus is more dangerous than Covid-19 or any other virus infecting the human consciousness, and subsequently the human attitude and behavior. Whatever we may do, human race is destined to become extinct, sooner or later. If one looks at fossil record, majority of various species that ever existed, have become extinct such as the dinosaurs and other mammoth animals which have disappeared from the face of this planet Earth very long ago. And the same may eventually happen to humans. According to Jain canonical text *Bhagavatī Sūtra* (7.6.31-32), the pathetic condition which is due to happen at the extreme end of the sixth epoch of the descending time cycle called *duṣamāduṣamā*, only a handful of human beings would endure. Only seventy-two families of these human beings will survive as a few seeds which would serve as a gene for future human species. The Darwinian evolution – natural selection and survival of the fittest theory also is in congruence with this assertion. At the speed, with which the pandemics, epidemics or endemics take the toll, supplemented by self-centered reasons man-made, the extinction of human race will eventually occur earlier than destined. Thus, a disciplined life is important, not for earth, economics or for survival of civilization but for development of better conscience.

No longer can we afford to passively close our eyes and only let the events happen unnoticed in order just to get a momentary foolish relief from the imminent disaster; in the same way that a rabbit neglecting the fear of its death by merely closing the eyes, against the deadly attack of a cat with conniving attitude, rather than looking for a solution by putting full efforts to avert the end.

The human consciousness is most capable of finding solutions to all eventualities. There are anti-viruses for all viruses. The concept of ‘spiritual technology’ that is loaded with antibodies to not only treat the global problems and create a new world-order on the foundation of inner peace, equality and harmony in human lives, but also as a result, provide a paradigm shift in economic development wherein the man will be positioned at its nucleus, while all material acquisitions will be at its periphery.

The issue of Mithyātva (Perverted view)

In the absence of development of non-absolutistic attitude, myriads of problems crop up in our life. Perhaps, if the enlightened view based on relativity of truth is adopted, the problems would not blow up to an alarming extent. There are two ways of expression: (i) What I say alone is right, what you say is nothing but wrong, (ii) what I assert is right and what you think can also be right. It goes without saying that the relativistic approach adopted in the latter way, if accepted, then there would be lesser chances of conflict. (Mahapragya 132).

Mahāvīra preached *anekāntavāda* so that our view does not become vitiated with partiality or perverseness. In other words, the enlightened worldview is based on relativistic outlook and conversely, the perverted worldview hangs on the string of *ekāntavāda* (that is, singularity of

standpoint). No doubt that violence, telling lies, stealing, anger, egotism, etc. are considered sinful, but perverted view is described as the greatest sin of all.

One of the most pernicious perverted views is the materialistic inclination towards life. The right view is that both soul and matter (body) are relatively necessary for life, but if soul is neglected and only matter is pursued, then, as it is a perverted view, the materialistic approach would be the cause of all mishaps in life. One of the strong pillars of the model of Relative Economics is giving up of the one-sided attitude of sheer materialism. The integrated approach would not deny the significance of material objects (money etc.), but it is against considering ‘eat, drink and be merry’ as be-all and end-all of life.

Self-limitation leads to Sustainability

Tents are usually made by fastening the fabric to the stake or pole in the ground to make it stable. Without support of stake or pole, tent cannot be secured. Similarly, limitation of desire for possession (*icchā parimāṇa*) is like a tent in our life. *Aparigraha* (non-possession) is the fifth great vow of the Jain ascetic, whereas *icchā parimāṇa* is the fifth vow of the lay follower in which he puts voluntary restrictions upon his boundless sky-like desire for possessions (Jain Paribhasika Sabdakosa, Dictionary of Technical Terms of Jainism 69). According to Jain code of conduct, three stakes are required to make it sustainable:³

1. **Spatial limitation-** Limiting the movement in all directions (*digvrata*).
2. **Material limitation-** Limiting the consumption of material objects (*bhogopabhoga-parimāṇa vrata*).
3. **Violence limitation-** Limiting any purposeless acts of violence (*anarthadaṇḍa-viramaṇa vrata*).

These three are the supplementary vows for *icchā parimāṇa vrata*. The will for limiting the desires cannot be achieved without observing these three vows. The outcome of such a model of economics based on relative values will result into a happy individual, a harmonious family, a helpful society, and a strong nation.

Humanistic Economics – A Boon

Luckily, India has a rich legacy of spiritual technology, which is a treasure of scientifically provable techniques to put an end to the mess created by ourselves. In it, the Jain canonical

³ “disivae tivihe paṇṇatte – uḍḍhadisivae tiriyadisivae | disivayassa samaṇovāsaṇaṃ ime pañca aiyārā jāṇiyavvā, taṃ jahā – uḍḍhadisipamāṇāikkame ahodisipamāṇāikkame tiriyadisipamāṇāikkame khittuvuḍḍhī saiaṃtaraddhā |
Uavabhogaparibhogavāe divihe paṇṇatte, taṃ jahā -bhoṇao samaṇovāsaṇaṃ ime pañca aiyārā jāṇiyavvā, taṃ jahā – sacittāhāre sacittapaḍi baddhāhāre appauliosahibhakkhaṇayā tucchosahibhakkhabhakkhaṇayā duppaulisahibhakkhabhakkhaṇayā | kammaṇaṃ samaṇovāsaṇaṃ imāṃ paṇṇarasa kammādāṇāṃ jāṇiyavvā, taṃ jahā – iṃgālakamme vaṇakamme sādīkamme bhādīkamme phoḍīkamme daṃtavāṇijje lakkhavāṇijje rasavāṇijje kesavāṇijje visavāṇijje jaṃtapīlaṇakamme nillamchaṇakamme davaggiḍāvaṇayā saradahtalāyasosaṇayā asaṇposañayā |
Aṇatthadaṇḍe cauvvihe paṇṇatte, taṃ jahā -avajjhāṇārie pamattāyariye himsappayāṇe pāvakammovaese | Aṇatthadaṇḍaveramaṇassa samaṇovāsaṇaṃ ime pañca aiyārā jāṇiyavvā, taṃ jahā – kaṃdappe kukkuie saṃjuttāhigaraṇe uvabhogaparibhogāireṃge |” (Tulsi 22)

literature is replete with such maxims which hold the key to extinguish the fire of greed burning fiercely inside the human brain.

The Jain scriptures insist on striking at the very root of transmigration which is identified as passions (*kaṣāya*). For example, the passion of greed has been regarded as the chief culprit in the time immemorial bondage of soul. It has been asserted: anger destroys the mutual affection; pride extirpates the quality of modesty; deceit annihilates the merit of friendliness while greed uproots everything – affection, modesty as well as friendliness. The Jain scriptures further elucidate the path of freedom from the passions: Eradicate anger through the practice of forgiveness; conquer pride by exercising humility; vanquish deceit by means of guilelessness and surmount greed through the power of contentment.⁴

The spiritual strategy to win over the internal foes which are responsible for the crippling of otherwise powerful soul has been manifested in these wordings: First of all captivate the most notorious enemy of the soul, viz. your own psyche (the most vital form of consciousness within the soul); (on overcoming it) the four passions viz. anger, pride, deceit and greed would automatically get overpowered; in this way, having overwhelmed the five front-row foes, you shall overthrow the ten naughtiest adversaries namely (i) the psyche, (ii-v) passion quartets and (vi-x) the five sense organs (i.e. tactile, gustatory, olfactory, eyesight and auditory). Thus, ultimately all the foes can be defeated.⁵

The failed modern theories of economics as such needs to be taken over by the alternate, more vibrant concept of relative economics, that is humanistic in approach, which is rooted in the cardinal ethical principles of Jainism of non-violence and non-possessiveness (Bapna 64). Relative Economics is an economic thought based on the philosophy expounded by Bhagavāna Mahāvīra. The economic ideas of relative economics aim to promote spiritual development and harmony with a rejection of pure materialism (Bapna 89).

Acharya Mahapragya the propounder of the module of Relative Economics, says “that which breaks the peace of the world will also destroy the peace of the individual. What does not become a threat to the peace of either the individual or the world, ought to be the first guiding parameter of a new economic policy.” (Mahapragya 92)

Relative Economics is economics based on spiritualism having humane approach. Relative Economics that is human-centric lays emphasis on self-restraint, non-violence, truth, and other virtues, which should be followed in actions so that there may be lasting peace in the society (Bapna 61). The demand of the present times is the fulfillment of economic needs as also peace, and there needs to be harmony between the two. Therefore, we need to see the

⁴ kohaṃ māṇaṃ ca māyaṃ ca lobhaṃ ca pāvavaḍḍhaṇaṃ | vame cattāri doso u icchaṃto hiyamappaṇo || koho pīṇaṃ paṇāseī māṇo viṇayanāsaṇo | māyā mittāṇi nāseī loho savvaviṇāsaṇo || (*Daśavaikālika Sūtra* 8.37-38)

⁵ ege jiye jiyā pañca pañca jiye jiyā dasa | dasahā u jīṇittāṇaṃ savvasattū jīṇāmahaṃ || sattū ya ii ke vutte? keṣī goyamamabbavī | tao keṣiṃ buvaṃtaṃ tu goyamo iṇamabbavī || egappā ajie sattū kaṣāyā indiyāṇi ya | je jīṇittu jahāṇāyaṃ viharāmi ahaṃ muṇī! || (*Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* 23.36-38)

relative economics that fulfils human needs and the economics of peace are complementary to each other (Bapna 3).

In Jainism, the prime ethical value in social life is limiting worldly possessions and desires (*icchā-parimāṇa*) on the strength of which it is possible to develop other principles like non-violence, truth, honesty etc. Without making *icchā-parimāṇa* as the foundation, the above principles may not flourish. The main issue today is that the people want there should be no war, no violence, no corruption; rather there should be peace, honesty, and friendliness. The source reason is the instinct of possessiveness which makes human being indulge in violence etc. The problem of environmental pollution, global warming, climate change and many others are also the result of lopsided materialistic development. No doubt, people earnestly wish to solve the problems but they do not pay heed to the main root cause. It is only through the development of the basic principles of Humanistic Economics that check on this problem could be established. The Jain ethics prescribe self-restraint as the key antidote to the instinct of possessiveness. Cultivation of self-restraint in economic system is possible only if the conviction that in absence of self-restraint, the economic development would lead mankind to lots of problems such as environmental pollution ecosystem imbalance and so on, is affirmed and put into practice.

Conclusion

If this apocalypse (of Covid-19) which we have faced in the present times does not teach us valuable lessons, nothing else will. It is a bundle of past mistakes that cumulates and reflects on the present scenario. We need to change the way we think, else we pay even a thicker price going forward.

Unless desirable paradigm shift in economics is achieved, not only the humankind will be pushed into many more pandemics but also there are so many other catastrophes which may even result in total extinction of life on earth. For this, the application of *ahimsā* and *aparigraha* (or *icchāparimāṇa*) are the best practicable spiritual practice. This should be globally popularized and later on, through training programs meticulously managed, the desired development can be brought about, not only in terms of fundamental economic needs, but also advancement in human values like compassion, co-operation, contentment, congeniality and last but not the least, conduct, devoid of utter greediness.

As already discussed, for eliminating the perversion in the worldview, the education system has to be reformed in such a way that the man (who is presently on the periphery) replaces money (which is now the nucleus) and ultimately, together with fulfilment of basic needs of the human society, the moral and spiritual values are inculcated in the human brain from the very childhood.

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