

Economics of Nonviolence and The Vision of a Sustainable World

(A thematic analysis based on Acharya Mahapragya's philosophy)

A Dismal Global Scenario

The gale of globalization continues to blow across the world sweeping hapless humans caught in the web of abject penury despite angry protests and voices of sanity demonstrated worldwide. We now realize that corporate armies are too strong to withstand. The forests continue to shrink, the species that are vitally important for our survival into the third millennium are being systematically destroyed, drinking water is being contaminated by pesticides and chemical wastes, the dangerous gases like carbon dioxide released by chemical industries continue to widen holes in ozone layers contributing to rapidly increasing global warming, and millions of men, women and children are being subjected to slow death in Asian regions. The latest UN report on environmental and ecological degradation in Asia predicts a dismal and bleak future for the people of the world. In his book entitled World War III an eminent environmentalist Michael Tobias warns us against a biological tragedy looming large on our heads. From the dense tropics, Himalayan highlands and African savannahs to the world's many megacities, Tobias presents an extraordinary testimony to the planet's human ecological culprits and victims. He states:

India's several hundred million residents who are below the so-called absolute poverty line have no choice but to strip bare the remaining forests, while the fast emerging Indian middle class is beginning to achieve a modicum of economic security – which it has been denied throughout history – but at the unfortunate price of totally determining all remaining semi-wild habitat throughout the country.

The disaster that is closing in on humankind is man-made. It is the human greed that is at its root. One third of the budgets that the different countries of the world prepare for the so-called development purposes are meant for their armies and arms including the nuclear ones. I am tempted to quote the following paragraphs from the forward of the Gaia Peace Atlas written in 1987 by Javier Perez de Cuellar, the then U.N. Secretary General:

At present, almost a thousand billion dollars are expended each year on arms and armed forces, making substantial resources unavailable for sustainable economic and social development.

The wanton extravagance entailed by the arms race is apparent from the fact that its expenses exceeds the total income of the poorer half

of humanity and the combined gross national products of large countries in Asia and Africa.

Dr. Frank Barnaby, the general editor of the Gaia Peace Atlas, redefines economics for a sustainable world in the Chapter entitled **Redirection: A Sustainable Future** in the following words:

Tomorrow's world will depend on a radical transformation of our economic and monetary systems and values. The new economics will reflect the finite limits of the planet's resources and the overriding requirements of sustainable development and social justice. "Growth" must be in quality, instead of quantity.

In reality the world today is sitting on the mouth of a volcano. If nothing is done to check the growing menace, a time will come when humans will lose control over everything. We believe that it is time the political leaders, spiritual thinkers and leaders of civil society turned their attention towards these critical problems, which are threatening our existence and generating a wave of hatred across the globe. Non-sustainability in our ways of living might result in an unprecedented ecological and environmental crisis widening the gap between the rich and the poor and giving rise to incurable diseases, epidemics and shortages of essential commodities on the planet.

Causative Factors: Views of Ecological Thinkers

His Holiness Acharya Mahapragya, the author of Economics of Mahavira, and the spiritual Patron of Anuvrat Movement, a movement that inspires people to pledge themselves to observe small vows (basic vows) enjoining them to refrain from inessential violence, war, ostentation, religious intolerance, injury to green trees, environmental pollution, dishonesty and deception in business, intoxicants like alcohol and drugs like heroin etc. is deeply concerned about this self-inflicted deplorable plight of the people of this planet.

He is of the view that the root of the problem lies in our lifestyle propelled by competitive modern economics totally devoid of ethical values. It is making people self-centred, greedy, insensitive and violent. Economic power wielded by multinationals is contributing greatly to a cult of violence and hatred. The current model of economic systems being followed all over the world is accelerating the slide to eco-catastrophe, according to Acharya Mahapragya. Let us listen to what he says:

"If economics continues to remain merely the economics of utility, it will not be possible for us to remove social disparities. If the basic human values like nonviolence, peace, purity of means, self-restraint as propounded by Lord Mahavira are integrated with the modern economic principles, it will bring about a big change in social outlook towards production, distribution and consumption. It will also result in the fulfillment of the primary needs of the poor and weaker sections of society. Lord Mahavira had laid down the vow of non-possession for ascetics. He

knew that it was not possible for the house-holders to refrain completely from possession, so he propounded the principle of limiting individual desires and needs. If an individual can limit his desires and needs, it will pave the way for an economically sustainable society.”

Mahapragya’s new model of economics is based on Lord Mahavira’s philosophy rooted in nonviolence, which is an all-encompassing human trait indispensable and inevitable for the sustainability of the world.

There are many sane voices across the world, which seem to support his model of economics. Paul Hawken, the author of *Growing Business, the Ecology of Commerce and Natural Capitalism* and an activist expresses identical views in his book ‘*Dreams of a Livable Future*’. He writes:

“Democracy, ecology and cultural vitality depend on a new economic vision for the world. By almost any measure, multinational corporations have failed spectacularly on their promise of fostering global democracy and prosperity. All publicly held corporations live a lie. They believe that we reside in a world where capital has the right to grow and that right is a higher right than the rights of people to their culture and what we hold in common. But it is also true that you can’t get to sustainability from an economic model that strives first and foremost to increase the amount of money large corporations have.

I do not believe that any Fortune 500 company can be sustainable, but there are definitely things that transnational corporations can do to help society and the environment. They can:

- *Get out of our schools.*
- *Get out of our stomachs.*
- *Get out of our government.*
- *Get out of our rivers, oceans, and forests.*
- *Get out of our skies and soils.*
- *Get out of our seeds and the human genome.”*

According to him local economies are vitally important to sustain the world. If they are destroyed, millions will perish or languish due to starvation and lack of resources to protect them. The same ideal runs through the pages of Schumacher’s wonderful book called ‘*Small is Beautiful*’ Acharya Mahapragya’s Anuvrat Movement highlights the same ideal when it asks people to begin the process of self-transformation through small commitments, a path to sustainability, which even if twenty percent of the global population follow, might bring about radical positive changes on the globe. Anuvrat Movement is, in fact, synonymous with the new paradigm of deep ecology as advocated by Fritjof Capra in his inspiring book ‘*Web of Life*’. He denounces modern economics which views life in a society as a competitive struggle for existence and nurtures the belief in unlimited material progress to be achieved through economics and technological growth. These have already been challenged by recent events. Capra says, “Deep ecology doesn’t separate humans from the natural environment. It sees the world as a network of

phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life.”

Fritjof Capra pleads for the shifts in perceptions and ways of thinking. He is of the view that we have overemphasized the self-assertive and neglected the integrative tendencies. He puts these opposite tendencies side by side.

THINKING		VALUES	
Self- Assertive	Integrative	Self-Assertive	Integrative
Rational	Intuitive	Expansion	Conservation
Analysis	Synthesis	Competition	Cooperation
Reductionist	Holistic	Quantity	Quality
Linear	Nonlinear	Domination	Partnership

It will be of interest to the citizens concerned about this deplorable state of the world to read a paragraph from the Report of the Independent Commission of Population and Quality 1996 headed by Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, former Portuguese Prime Minister:

“Riding as it does on the extensive exploitation of natural resources, modern industrial civilization made Nature subservient to economic purposes and forgot Nature’s need – that of self-renewal. Within the economic paradigm of unending growth impelled by the Industrial Revolution, Nature, instead of being the main resource as in agrarian societies, became one of several assets. It lost its claim to favoured treatment that had long been institutionalized, even ritualized, in agrarian cultures.”

Mahapragya’s Vision and His Model of Nonviolence-Oriented Economics

Acharya Mahapragya’s vision of a sustainable world is not different from the vision of Fritjof Capra and other ecological thinkers of the modern world. It has in it the basic components that ensure that rivers flow the whole year round, mountains and hills are green, all living beings that inhabit the planet are taken care of and they cooperate rather than compete with one another, resources are fairly distributed, greed is restrained, people abide by a global ethic of sustainability and there is harmony in everything. His vision calls for reconciliation between science and spirituality. Science explores the world of materialistic objects and spirituality explores the inner world, which is infinitely infinite and is the storehouse of enlightenment and wisdom. Both are complementary to each other. His vision further unfolds itself in 21 conditions laid down in the 1995 Ladnun Declaration for a Nonviolent World and Ecological Harmony Through Spiritual Transformation. It was adopted by delegates from all over the world who participated in an international conference on Living in Harmony with Nature organized under him and his Guru late Acharya Tulsi’s auspices at Ladnun in Dec. 1995. These conditions include:

- (1) **Non-acquisitiveness** – It means non-accumulation of excessive material wealth, non-greed, generosity, simplicity. These are pre-conditions for true peace and ecological harmony.

- (2) **Education for Peace and Human Rights** - It is a vital necessity and we must develop the full human potential of all children and adults, including the cultivation of our spiritual natures.
- (3) **Basic Vows** – They can be undertaken towards goodness, towards global transformation, lighting one small candle at a time, receiving strength and receiving inspiration from spiritual saints.
- (4) **Codes of Universal Ethical Conduct** – They can be found at the living spiritual heart of the great faith traditions of our beautiful planet. It includes the Anuvrat Movement which is a network of self-transformed people and millions of people have volunteered to observe them in their day today dealings.
- (5) **Nonviolence** – It is the bedrock of our ethical vision, together with tolerance and non-absolutism. The Cosmic Spirit intends us to live lives of nonviolence and ethical beauty, seeking always to minimize the violence and suffering that we see around us and maximize the faculties of compassion, love, understanding and peacefulness.
- (6) **Peace Actions** – They can therefore arouse the conscience and rightmindfulness of civil, political and military leaders as well as industrialists. They should be undertaken in a spirit of loving witness to truth. We must emulate the examples of Mahatma Gandhi and Ganadhipati Tulsi who have inspired young and old to do good turns for the people and never to use nuclear weapons.
- (7) **Global Values** – They are embodied in the great spiritual teachings, such as the Jain Philosophy. These values must become embodied in our economic systems.
- (8) **Meditation** – It includes all its diverse forms and practices of which Preksha Meditation is also one such technique. It can be a healing agent to this world of conflict and violence.
- (9) **Prayer or Paying Obeisance to Pure Souls** – This also can be a vital source of great inner empowerment in the search for peace and harmony, in the transformation of attitudes and actions along the paths of righteousness.
- (10) **Multicultural Harmony** – It is an essential expression of the awesome grandeur, variety and beauty of life in its infinite array. Let us all celebrate unity in diversity.
- (11) **Lifestyle Development** – It is something which naturally occurs as the spiritual journey of awakening and self-realization is undertaken: one consumes less and gives more, one lives in simplicity and non-attachment.

- (12) **Purification of Consciousness** – It is at the heart of the spiritual journey, and thus all practices which cloud and obscure the natural state of pure consciousness and being such as harmful intoxicants, drugs become seen as dangerous. All habits and practices which cause violence and suffering will fall gradually away as the consciousness is purified along the spiritual path.
- (13) **Education and Spiritual Growth** – It is expected that institutes like Jain Vishva Bharati and Anuvrat Vishva Bharati (ANUVIBHA) blossom around the world and contribute to positive global transformation to take heart and strength in their educational work for peace, justice and ecological harmony.
- (14) **Creative Arts and Crafts** - They have also great potential to contribute to the achievement of world peace and ecological harmony. We are all impressed by the sacred arts, and by the links between spirituality and artistic creativity in their common work for positive global transformation.
- (15) **Interfaith Activity** – It is a very important sphere for creative peacebuilding efforts. Initiatives in the form of spiritual and religious movements for inspiring people to be ethical in their behaviour launched by Ganadhipati Tulsi and other leaders must be supported.
- (16) **Sacred Peace Places** – They are a vital aspect of all religious traditions. We feel distressed to note that sacred sites are being despoiled by war. There is a great need to preserve these sacred places embodying values of peace and nonviolence.
- (17) **Spiritual Guides and Living Saints** – They play an important role in promoting spiritual and ethical values in society. Contact with such living examples of realized persons leaves a tranquilizing effect on all.
- (18) **Spiritual Scholarships** – Similarly, we must not underestimate the potential for peacebuilding which can be forged by cross cultural and interfaith scholarship; in the preservation and translation of the world's sacred texts a powerful source can be found for the distillation and transmission of the accumulated wisdom of the past ages as guarantors towards a beautiful future.
- (19) **Science Ecology and Spirituality** – We are all concerned about them. Is it not discernable that the latest advances in scientific thought have begun to reaffirm the essential place of the Unknowable back at the heart of scientific endeavour, and that the development of the ecological sciences, with their insistence on the interconnectedness of the phenomena of life, have played a major role in this process?
- (20) **Business, Finance, Industry, Technology, Development, Politics, the Professions, and Spirituality** – These spheres are likewise important areas of contemporary social activity where the voice of conscience and spirituality must be heard and applied, and fortunately a growing number of politicians, business leaders, industrialists, technologists, and professionals working in

these and related fields, are becoming more responsive to the urgent promptings of common sense and spiritual integrity.

- (21) **The Spirituality of Ecology and Nonviolence** – It remains our central contribution to the planetary situation; wars, violence and conflicts arise from the perception of duality, of separateness, of otherness. We pledge to work for the protection of all sentient beings from harm and suffering, and to strive to live up to the core truth of the unity of all life, in thought, word and deed, at all times, through lives of harmlessness, nonviolence, compassion and service.

Though Acharya Mahapragya is basically a spiritual leader, he has come to the conclusion that the current model of economics being followed by the developed countries is not suitable for the developing and the underdeveloped countries on account of different ecological, social, cultural and environmental conditions that prevail there. He is of the view that though production, consumption and distribution are the basic features of modern economics, they need to be embedded in ahimsa. Unlimited production and undesirable consumption as well as selective distribution benefit only an affluent section of society and render the poor much poorer. He presented a thirteen-point analysis of the current economic system and proposed a five-point programme for remedying the maladies at an international conference held in Dec. 2005 under his auspices. He has coined a new term for economics i.e. ahimsa sapeksha arthshastra (nonviolence-oriented economics). I consider Acharyaji's presentation a new paradigm shift in the area of economic thinking.

It asserts (1) that the policy of economic development in modern economics is violence-oriented (2) which is used more in violent activities than in fulfilling the needs of human life (3) that unethical practices in business have risen (4) that greed for wealth is increasing (5) that small-scale industries are being neglected widening the gulf between the rich and the poor (6) that machine is becoming more important than human labour causing unemployment (7) that wealth is becoming an end in itself (8) that the inevitability, necessity and utility of accumulation of wealth have become secondary (9) that the policy of investment is not right (10) wealth is causing reactive violence (11) that industrial development is promoting individualism (12) individual selfishness and hedonistic mentality are escalating (13) that the stream of compassion is drying up and the vital problem of eliminating hunger is not being given a top priority.

We discover an echo of what Acharya Mahapragya is teaching in the constitution of UNESCO:

“Since wars begin in the minds of human beings, it is in the minds of human beings, men and women, that the defences of peace have to be constructed” – so runs the guiding constitution of UNSECO, yet hitherto, apart from the Yamoussoukro Declaration, insufficient attention has been paid to the details of precisely how these defences of peace can be created in all our minds. Mahapragya has begun the task of focusing attention on the spiritual aspects of this difficult work. Hope can be said to have begun its work efficiently. He urges your own involvement in this process, begun but not completed here in Delhi or Ladnun.

For a new economic model containing defences of peace he has laid down the following five principles to remedy the economic ailment, which grips the world today:

1. reconciliation between human labour and machine,
2. greater investment in community-oriented priorities,
3. preserving environment for the coming generations,
4. nurturing decentralized economy,
5. an alternative economic system to address the problems of disparity, hunger and unemployment.

Acharyaji's economic thinking is further reflected in his classic entitled **Anuvrat Darshan** wherein he makes the following observation:

Acquisition or parigrah is a man's belief. It is also his belief that a materialistic object is valuable and that it is a source of joy. The fulfillment of a need is neither joy nor sorrow. The concept of happiness that lies beyond that is his psychic belief. A materialistic object (padarth) is neither parigrah (a tendency to possess and acquire materialistic wealth) nor is it the cause of bondage or sorrow. It becomes the cause of bondage or sorrow only when we associate our desire with it. In reality parigrah is synonymous with desire.

Economics of Mahavira

Lord Mahavira, the 24th Jaina Tirthankar, was not an economist and he didn't express any views on economic principles directly but Acharya Mahapragya has developed these principles from the former's utterances on renunciation and self-restraint. Mahavira had laid down the standards governing desires and prescribed the limits of consumption. We must realize that economic systems emerge from interactive human behaviour. The imbalance in the economic social order is generated by man's deviation from a righteous path. Mahavira studied these patterns of human behaviour and propensities for deviation and laid down a twelve-fold code of conduct for his disciples based on twelve small vows. Mahavira had prescribed these vows in an age of abundance, which are embedded in nonviolence-oriented economics. Of them the first five *anuvrats* and the rest seven supplementaries are as follows:

The five *anuvrats* include *sthula pranatipataviramana* (abstinence from unnecessary violence, that is, the intentional killing of *trasa jiva*) *sthula mrsavadaviramana* (such acts of falsehood as may lead to the destruction of a village or a house), *sthula adattadanaviramana* (taking away things not given), *sthula maithunaviramana* (illicit sexual relationship with someone else's spouse), and *sthula parigrahaviramana* (acquiring wealth, cattle, corn, land and gold) beyond a limit.

The seven supplementary vows which enrich the observer of the small vows are: 'refraining from movement beyond a limited area,

restricting movement to an even more limited area, refraining from wanton destruction of the environment by thought, word or deed, keeping aloof from sinful conduct for a set period of time, fasting on sacred days and observing special restrictions at secluded places, limiting the use of consumable and non-consumable goods, offering alms to wandering ascetics.' (*Tattvartha Sutra* 7.15).

It is the last vow *yathasamivibhaga vrata* that plays an important role in giving rise to a new economic model which Mahapragyaji has envisioned. This vow alone, if observed by most of the people of this world, can create a sustainable and nonviolent society in the world. Mahavira goes to the extent of saying that he who does not share his resources, eatables and other objects of daily use with others will not be able to attain liberation.

The main problem today that humanity is facing pertains to inequitable distribution of resources among the people of the world. No one wants to part with what he has already grabbed. This possessive tendency of a human being is mainly responsible for all our woes and sufferings. Most religions of the world subscribe to the view that the planet belongs to God and all those who inhabit it are his children. If it is so, why is it that 15 percent of the global population has monopolized 85 percent of the resources available on this planet? It is this imbalance that can be removed only if every citizen of the world accepts the twelfth *anuvrat* i.e. *yathasamivibhaga vrata*. Acharya Mahapragya has been endeavouring to make the people realize that the key to all the problems of disparity, inequality and poverty lies in this *anuvrat* alone. It forms the central theme of Acharya Mahapragya's economic vision which to my mind has in it the potential to extricate the world from the mire in which it lies enmeshed today.

Conclusion

For the creation of a sustainable world and particularly a sustainable India Acharya Mahapragya is promoting a three-dimensional programme of human regeneration consisting of Anuvrat Movement (small individual commitments to live the good life), Jivan Vigyan (art of living to enhance students' emotional competence) and Preksha Meditation (a scientific technique to enable a person to live stress-free life). In addition he has also launched a massive programme to train young and old in nonviolence. To generate awareness among people he is continuing his Ahimsa Yatra – a barefoot journey on foot to inspire people to switch over to a nonviolent lifestyle. Let us hope his efforts for the creation of a nonviolent sustainable world will yield the desired results in years to come.