



## Economic Disparity and *Aprigraha*

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### Abstract:

*To be born as human being is an important achievement. In entire experienceable world only human beings are gifted with reason. But to have this faculty of reason does not mean that reason should be employed to make others suffer. The meaning and significance of life is contained in harmonious self-development.*

*There are two directions of life, namely spiritual and material. Enjoyment (gratification of senses) and renouncing are the two diametrically opposite realms. None of these exclusive poles can alone be a constructive element of society. A social being can neither be exclusively an enjoyer of the senses nor can he be exclusively away from all and every sort of attachment and indulgence. A materialistic life is a life of selfishness and a transcendental life is a life of renunciation. The life of a combination of both is necessary for a social being. To express this, Jaina thought offers a maxim—'parasparopagraha jīvānām'. This maxim pertains not only to the individual to lead a social life, but is actually a maxim pertaining to the entire human existence in the world.*

**Aprigraha** means not only non-over accumulation of wealth but also giving up all attachment to things or abstaining from attachments. Mahāvira was one such man of contemplation. He had risen above home, family, society, nation, etc. He was thus not an exponent of economics. When there is no accumulation or possession there is no meaning of economics. But Mahāvira knew that all man cannot attain such perfection and such a state of absolute renunciation can be attained only by few, so he gave the maxim of *icchā-parimāṇa* with a view to checking or limiting the tendency of *parigraha*. This maxim is not total annihilation of the tendency of *parigraha*, but urges its limited use. From this point of view there are two meanings or forms of

*aparigraha, namely absolute inexistence of parigraha and second restrained or limited existence of parigraha. This limited, controlled or regulated parigraha can be called the economics of aparigraha.*

**Key words:** aprigraha, altruism, economic disparity, consumption, corruption

To be born as human being is an important achievement. In entire experienceable world only human beings are gifted with reason. But to have this faculty of reason does not mean that reason should be employed to make others suffer. The meaning and significance of life is contained in harmonious self-development.

## **Two Directions of Human Development**

There are two directions of life, namely spiritual and material. Those who see life only as a process of material development, have a natural bent for materialistic ideals and gratification of senses. Unless one is able to see the spiritualistic aspect of life, one cannot be expected to have any spiritualistic ideal which is well beyond the materialistic ideals.

Enjoyment (gratification of senses) and giving-up or renouncing are the two diametrically opposite realms. None of these exclusive poles can alone be a constructive element of society. A social being can neither be exclusively an enjoyer of the senses nor can he be exclusively away from all and every sort of attachment and indulgence. A materialistic life is a life of selfishness and a transcendental life is a life of renunciation. The life of a combination of both is necessary for a social being. To express this, Jaina thought offers a maxim—'parasparopagraha jīvanām', this maxim pertaining not only to the individual to lead a social life, but actually pertaining to the entire human existence in the world.

Some people believe that life preservation and self-preservation or self-existence can be ensured only by the use of violence. Such people believe in the law of might as being right and that the stronger forms of life eat up or destroy the weaker forms of life or organisms; this is the law of nature. The

principle of survival of the fittest cannot be broadly rejected, but with reference to social existence and order, one must realize that violence may be needed yet not desirable or inspirational. This realization marks the beginning of man's social rationality. In pre-historic times there prevailed a kind of primitive communism: man was totally dependent on the bounties of nature and consumed only what was available in nature. Men were few and nature was abundant and thus there was no scarcity of resources and life was easy. Aprigraha means not only non-over accumulation of wealth but also giving up all attachment to things or abstaining from attachments.

Though man had to defend and protect himself from beasts, yet there was absence of desire of having more and more; he had not developed the attitude and attachment of things. Population and reason grew together, while desires and attachment grew with increasing expectations and hope. The natural resources however did not grow more and many increasing desires and greed started to make situations critical. Underlining man's needs and the greed it is well said that

"Body has limited needs and with little it is satisfied  
Desires are limitless and ever remain ungratified."

The beginning of social life was also the beginning of statehoods and forms of governances and, progressively, the expansionist greed of kings left millions dead. Under the garb of patriotism, man's ego saw no limits to expand, resulting in the exploitation of the environment and of mankind itself. Thus mankind had to experience the ills of slavery and suffer innumerable pains. Lord Mahāvira pronounced —

"suvaṇṇa rupssa u pavvayā bhava  
siyā hu kelāsa samāā aṇantayāā  
narassa luddhassa na tehi□ kinchi  
icchāā hu āāgās sama aṇantayāā"

This means that man's desires are limitless, like āthe entire space, ann, moreover, they can never be fully satisfied. Mahatama Gandhi also rightly said that earth provides sufficient resources to satisfy every man's needs but not enough to satisfy even one's greed. The real altruistic living makes man rise above narrow and parochial needs and such a man conceives entire humanity as his own person or family. He

ceases to be a problem creating being and becomes a part of solution to problems. One who is extremely desirous is not satisfied even with one's own family. His egoism does not allow him to consider the right and respect of the others and, although family is the first step towards altruism, it becomes a problem when it makes man egocentric and cut off from the rest of society.

Altruism also cannot be absolute and necessary and there should be a limit to it. One who keeps the needs of the society in mind while enhancing his desires can never be a wholly ego-centric person. He becomes wedded to the concept of co-existence. Such a person may not lead the transcendental life of the ascetic but, on the other hand, he can never live an entirely egocentric life. He cannot always put others to pain only to meet his selfish motives. Under these circumstances, the concept of co-existence inspires the attitude of aparigraha.

## **Democracy and economics**

Aparigraha is not an economic theory in the true sense of the word because its essence is detachment and renunciation. Economics basically deals with the satisfaction of desires and the production of utility whereas aparigraha implies giving away or giving up of desires and abstinence from all utility. Too many economic considerations lead to economic disparity, which generates violence, while economics is only a proximate end, not an ultimate one. The concept of democracy overtook that of expansionism because people realized the importance of altruism, but even democratic ideal could not wipe away the element of greed from human psyche and thus even democracy could not provide a peaceful economic system.

Economics aims at making man happy, aparigraha aims at generating internal as well as external peace for humankind. It is not that peace and pleasures cannot co-exist, but pleasures are based intrinsically on matter and peace is intrinsically based on soul. When the sole aim becomes or is reduced to pleasure alone, the entire endeavour concentrates on matter and consumption as well as on enjoyment of senses. Peace is not a necessity for such satisfaction of senses. However, once

true peace is attained, pleasures become insignificant. Pleasure is a function of senses and body, peace is a function of mind and soul. Not all can experience perfection of the self and thus an average man must strike a golden mean between the gratification of senses and mind and the perfection or realization of self. Aparigraha in a sense is the name of this balance only.

## **Economics of Aparigraha**

Various great men have commented on the concept of aparigraha. Mahāvira was one such man of contemplation, who had risen above home, family, society, and his nation. He was not an exponent of economics, yet he expressed the idea that when there is no accumulation or possession there is no meaning of economics. But Mahāvira knew that not all man can attain such perfection, that such a state of absolute renunciation can be attained only by few; therefore he formulated the maxim of *icchā-parimāṇa* with a view to checking or limiting the tendency of parigraha. This maxim does not refer to a total annihilation of the tendency of parigraha, but urges its limited use. From this point of view there arise two meanings or forms of aparigraha, namely absolute inexistence of parigraha and, secondly, the restrained or limited existence of parigraha. This limited, controlled or regulated parigraha can be called the economics of aparigraha.

## **The Concept of Modern Economics**

Ācārya Mahāprajña opines that modern economics is centred on material welfare only and its difficulty results from this biased outlook. Had this not been so there would not have been economic disparities and economic and economics related violence on such a large scale, there would not have been ‘cut throat’ competition and other similar negative aspects. An important figure of modern economics, Keynes, holds that our aim is to make every one wealthy, with morality playing no value for us. He very clearly says that the idea of immorality is not only insignificant, but it is also a hindrance in our path.

Modern economics does not aim at peace or at non-violence, its only aim being the economic growth. It aims at satisfying man's basic needs and making man resourceful. It thus indirectly implies that desires and greed, needs and production should increase in order to attain higher economic growth.

Corruption is a crucial problem in modern societies. Many people talk of corruption, but what ought to be realized is that any policy or theory which considers morality to be insignificant or hindrance is bound to generate and add to corruption only. It is no surprise that modern economics is also contributing to the growth of corruption.

However, some later economists, like Marshall, realized the importance of morality and held that finally morality should prevail but it is not necessary. Keynes on the other hand held that we shall consider morality after we become wealthy, the present not being the right occasion to consider morality. Economics is essentially utilitarian and pragmatic and the present truth is that which works. There is no question of morality.

Economic theory could have been considered to be successful to some extent if it had resulted in equal or near equal distribution of income. Communisms had experimented with the idea of equal income but even communism could not attain that aim. Gandhi declared that man can never realize the ideal of economic equality, because there are differences in the capabilities of the individuals and not all men can display the same capacity. The result of promoting free egoism is that the maximum wealth of the world today is concentrated with only a countable few. But an awkward fact is this that ever such top rich people also do not have sufficient peace.

An English author has rightly remarked—The tiger of worldly desires in human mind is more terrible than a living one. Unlimited desires lead one on the path of destruction. Man has also been much cheated by the idea of the 'standard of living'. Everyone aspires to raise his standard of living, although the problem still remaining that there are not enough means at his disposal. Luxury and material comforts have become indicators of development. Had the desires remained

confined to the fulfilment of basic needs would not there have been any problem? But the idea of the 'standard of living' has thrown the idea of basic needs out of fashion and minds and has made man irrationally desirous of useless items. The desire of more wealth has led the rich to produce more and sell more through deceptive and desire generating advertising. Such economics is not satisfying needs, but it is creating newer and non-essential needs.

Mankind has made miraculous scientific breakthroughs and discoveries leading to the development of industries and industrial production and larger distribution. Despite all this it can't be held that the development of science has only been blessing and there have been no negative results. Science has equally been misused and has become a cause of large scale destruction also. Man's greed is continually employing science for egoistic ends and this is resulting in the proliferation of egoistic economic practices where some are earning profits by exploiting others and the wealth and resources of others. The most scientific and technologically advanced weapons of mass destruction are earning maximal profits at the cost of peace on the globe. Had there been fair practice the divide of extremes would not have been generated. The same continue to be so rich that they have no account of their wealth while the same keep being so poor that they are starved to death. Mercy and altruism have not grown proportionate to technology and this is one of the basic causes of modern miseries. The geographic expansionism has been replaced by economic expansionism and imperialism and the basic greed has remained the same due to overemphasis on materialism and neglect of spiritualism. Some very small nations are today amongst the leading economic powers of the world.

The luxury, material grandeur and consumerism are promoting various kinds and means of violence. The demand and craze for leather goods kills many poor animals, while the demand for fine and durable plastics means killing spring chicks for their fur or feathers. Broilers are being fed in poultries for high volumes of quick meat. Slaughter houses have come up to meet the demand of meat exports. All this is being done for parigraha. This is as one cannot amass wealth

without inflicting cruelty or deceit, which are essential for accumulating and preserving wealth. Until we understand the concept of limiting possessions and attachment, we cannot save ourselves and this planet from such ills.

Limiting possessions is associated with limiting desires. When desires are being fanned, one cannot appreciate even the talk of limited possessions as only large scale possessions will matter. Focus on limiting possessions will refer to living beings and not to non-living beings, popularly known as material wealth. Man is also one of the living beings but not all living beings are human. The doctrine of co-existence thus brings into focus man and his environment in close harmony thereby putting brakes on the dangerous exploitation of our environment and natural resources. Jains say air, water, fire, earth and vegetation are all living beings and rampant destruction of these is a serious concern even for the very existence of mankind. An offshoot of heavy and unplanned industrialization is environmental pollution. Industrialization has exploited not only forests and mineral resources but has also taken a high toll of environment. The loss of minimum ecological balance shall result in disaster and total destruction of humankind.

While explaining aparigraha, it is said that 'mucchā pariggāho vutto', which means that attachment is parigraha. As long as man has desires or attachment, he remains poor. Even with a maximum of wealth, but with growing desires for more, man shall ever remain poor. Such a man is not happy himself and causes misery to others as well. On the other side, man with the aparigraha attitude is happy despite being materially poor. Real wealth thus lies in right thinking and the right attitude towards life and it is not material prosperity.

Aparigrahi can be happy without money or wealth whereas parigrahi (a follower of modern economic principles) is ever unhappy despite his high degree of economic well-being. Even the heaps of bullion can't make him happy, because they do not produce peace. Aparigraha brings to man the real treasure and wealth of peace, therefore standing as the most appropriate response to economic disparity.



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