

## Economics of Ahimsa and the Environment

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## **ABSTRACT**

I will focus on the use of ahimsa in challenging modern economics. At its root, the “crisis of the environment” is a consequence of the particular way in which the non-human world is viewed in modern economics (in its classical and Marxist variants). Ideas of economic development, progress and infinite growth are a result of reductionist thinking that separates man from his environment and views economic activity as a process of domination over nature. I will discuss the basic principles of a fundamentally non-modern “economics of ahimsa” (articulated, among others, by Gandhi, Kumarappa and Schumacher) and show how such an economics anticipates and transcends the current debates on limits to material economic growth, sustainability and environmental degradation through the use of concepts such as “swadeshi” and “aparigraha”. One way in which the environmental costs of industrial progress have entered the consciousness of those living in the advanced industrial economies is via declining “quality of life” that accompanies the “higher standard of living”. I will attempt to demonstrate that “caring for the environment” is not a technical issue of better pollution control or less greenhouse emissions, but instead a philosophical issue that goes to the root of how humans see their environment.

## INTRODUCTION

In my presentation today I am going to explore the implications of Ahimsa for the economic organization of society. By economic organization I refer to how we produce material goods, how we distribute them from producers to consumers and how we consume them in order to sustain and reproduce ourselves. I am also going to critique our modern industrial way of organizing production, distribution and consumption, as well as the economic theories that have arisen to defend this system. The principle claims I make are as follows. First that industrial capitalism is a violent system whose roots lie in the history of colonial disregard for nature and for other humans. Second that despite political decolonization, we have not yet economically decolonized ourselves and modern economics shows evidence of this in the way it conceptualizes the relationship between humans and nature. And third that the Economics of Ahimsa, as developed by Gandhi, Kumarappa and others, in response to the violence of industrial capitalism, offers us a way out. The idea that our ethical or moral values should govern our economic decisions is itself not new at all. All the major religions that I know of, talk about this. The Buddhist concept of the Right Livelihood or the early Christian and Islamic prohibition of usury, are good examples. Neither is a critique of modern industrial civilization a new thing that starts with Gandhi. Ruskin, Tolstoy, Marx, D.H. Lawrence, to name just a few, all articulated such critiques. Gandhi once said that non-violence was as old as the hills. But hopefully I will be able to cast it somewhat of a new light here.

### *Gandhi, Kumarappa and the Economics of Ahimsa*

We start with an introduction to Gandhi and Kumarappa. In modern times and particularly in the West, Ahimsa is most closely associated with the name of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's anti-imperialist struggle against the British *raj* in India and his philosophy of ahimsa are better known than his economic ideas. And yet he was very concerned with what would today be called development and modernization. Gandhi's economic ideas flowed naturally from his ethics and politics. Restriction of wants, self-reliance and economic equality which we will discuss today in the economic context, were first and foremost moral principles before they became principles for socio-economic organization. I will argue that despite being labeled unrealistic or utopian, these ideas may in fact be more relevant to issues of the environment and quality of life than theories to be found in textbooks of economics. Of course, in post-colonial India, Gandhi's economic ideas are only a nominal part of official economic policy. However, an investigation into Gandhian economic thought has made itself felt as a part of the growing literature on heterodox economics.<sup>1</sup> J.C. Kumarappa was a contemporary of Gandhi who independently developed ideas similar to Gandhi's. After returning to India with an MA in Economics from Columbia University, Kumarappa became Gandhi's co-worker and led the All India Village Industries Association for many years. Being a trained economist, Kumarappa was the official economic voice of the Gandhian village movement. Like Gandhi, he recognized that India's village industries, based on low-cost, labor-intensive, low environmental impact technology, and decentralized production, were crucial to restoring wealth and dignity to the masses. Two of his books outline his major ideas: "Economy of Permanence: a quest

for a social order based on non-violence” and “Why the village movement?” Besides these two he wrote many other books and articles of both theoretical and practical nature.<sup>2</sup> In his books Kumarappa criticizes economics that places excessive importance on material growth and ever-increasing standards of living. The type of economy that finds most favor with Kumarappa is one in which nature’s cycles are disturbed to a minimal extent by human activity. This is directly opposed to views articulated by luminaries of the European Enlightenment, such as Francis Bacon, who talked more of subjugating nature to human needs than living in harmony with her. Of course Gandhi and Kumarappa are by no means the only people who articulated a view of human-nature relationship that stresses balance and cooperation over control and conflict. The idea is prominent for example in Native American critiques of industrialism, to name but one. We can trace Kumarappa’s influence in the thought of British economist, Fritz Schumacher. In his famous book, “Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered”, Schumacher says:

“From the economic point of view, the central concept of wisdom is permanence. We must study the economics of permanence. Nothing makes sense unless its continuance for a long time can be projected without running into absurdities. There can be growth towards a limited objective but there cannot be unlimited, generalized growth.”<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1970s a whole school of economics called Ecological Economics has arisen to critique the endless pursuit of material prosperity that is the dominant trend in capitalist societies.<sup>4</sup>

We have already heard much about the concept of Ahimsa at this conference. So I will restrict myself to only a few relevant comments here. Ahimsa has been translated into English as “non-violence,” but it entails much more than the mere negation of violence. It is sometimes translated more appropriately as “love.” It is a positive idea that stands for a way of life that emphasizes simple living without doing undue violence to the earth and its creatures. Gandhi once said: “That economics is untrue which ignores or disregards moral values.” Similarly, Kumarappa, in “Economy of Permanence”, remarks, “an economy that is based purely on monetary or material standards of value, does not take a realistic perspective in Time and Space. This shortcoming leads to a blind alley of violence and destruction from which there is no escape.”<sup>5</sup>

There are several components to Gandhi’s and Kumarappa’s theory. For developing my own critique here I will focus mostly on their critique of “machine civilization” as inherently violent, and their concepts of *swadeshi* or the principle of local economy and *aparigraha*, the principle of minimization of wants or simplification of material life. The Economics of Ahimsa stresses local, decentralized community economies and economies of needs rather than wants. By de-emphasizing production for sake of production, consumption for sake of consumption or growth for sake of growth, it also tackles the thorny issue of how to achieve a basic material level of comfort for all without compromising the viability of future generations, or what has come to be called “sustainable development”. I repeat that several aspects of this critique and the alternatives I offer are to be found in various traditions all over the world, and especially those coming from the colonized peoples in the Americas, in Asia and Africa.

## *Capitalism and The Enlightenment Roots of Modern Economics*

The Economics of Ahimsa is a response, not just to the science of Modern Economics, but to the very way in which human society organizes itself and interacts with nature today. Moreover it is a response to the legacy of 300 or more years of capitalism. The Ahimsa perspective recognizes that, as a system of organizing our material life, industrial capitalism has failed spectacularly. We live with exploitation and alienation in the workplace, we see extreme poverty alongside extreme wealth, centralization of economic and political power, fragmentation of the family and division of humanity along endless fractures of class, race, and ethnicity. Further we have depleted and polluted our natural resources to unprecedented levels and global climate change is a reality to all but the most die-hard skeptics. We have turned our ecological and intellectual commons into commodities to be sold for profit to the point where none of us feels there is anything strange about buying water in plastic bottles or patenting words and phrases in the English language or denying farmers the right to replant their own seeds.

How did we end up here? The story has been told many times. Let me just sketch a brief outline. The First Industrial Revolution in England in the later half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century marked the culmination of the ideas developed during the European Enlightenment. With the invention of steam and coal powered machinery man was said to have “mastered nature” or become its sovereign.<sup>6</sup> This particular form of knowledge being generated during the Enlightenment was convenient for an economic system that needed nature to be just another commodifiable asset. Of course land, like labor did not become a commodity without fierce resistance from those who were used to different ways of conceptualizing their relationship with their land and work.<sup>7</sup> But in the end force and violence triumphed. One cannot talk of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of industrial capitalism, the so-called “Rise of the West” without talking about colonialism, slavery, massive looting of natural resources and decimation of entire populations via disease, starvation and war. It was a short step to bind into service and make slave, not just nature, but other humans who failed for reasons of primitiveness, race or toilet habits to make it into the group that did the controlling and the binding. As Sahasrabudhey has pointed out, it has been a truism in economics at least since Adam Smith that modern industry creates wealth. However those living in Asia, Africa and the Americas saw wealth being destroyed or stolen not created.<sup>8</sup>

But all this is history, you might say. The argument I want to make here is that this far from being irrelevant today. The disrespect towards nature and the callous disregard for what economists euphemistically call negative externalities (meaning unintended bad effects) were first practiced on a massive scale in the violent treatment of nature and peoples all over the world during the heyday of colonialism. The so-called externalities are still present today in such massive proportions because we continue to use technology that has not evolved very far from the technology developed at a time when these costs could be simply ignored, borne as they were by people who had no voices to complain. What is worse, this is not merely an issue of better technology or stronger legislation. Our views of nature, our ideas of what constitutes efficiency, our modern sciences also betray their origins. The many battles being waged today in India and all over the world over displacement of indigenous people for large-scale

industrial projects, such as large dams, is a case in point. Such examples can be multiplied. I think that this is what Gandhi had in mind when he referred to the “machine civilization” of the West as violent at its core. Externalization of costs is integral to the logic of capitalist production that emphasizes profit maximization and accumulation of more and more productive capacity, on the pain of death, death due to competition from other capitalists engaged in the same process. Neoclassical economics rewards this behavior by calling this process economically rational.<sup>9</sup>

Which brings us to the relationship between capitalism and modern economics. In fact, it is not possible to discuss modern economics without reference to Industrial Capitalism. At the risk of some simplification we can say that modern economics is the field of knowledge whose job is to apologize for today’s capitalist world-system. Mass production under capitalism needs demand for mass produced products, so Economics worships consumption. Capitalism demands that everything be for sale, so Economics extols markets, capitalism can only survive by accumulating more capital and so Economics praises endless production and growth and so on. At the same time, these aspects of economics could not be seen only as apologies for capitalism, they had to be portrayed as objective laws that governed economic behavior. Of course the result of this attempt to banish moral values from economics was not that it became a truly objective science (if such a thing exists) but only that the values that underlay economics became invisible. In other words they were no longer ideology or values, but became “fact”. The Economics of Ahimsa, as espoused by Gandhi and Kumarappa begins with the premise that facts and values are inextricably bound together. They should not and indeed cannot, be separated. Human economic activity is an integral part of humanity’s striving for truth and ahimsa. I repeat that modern economics no more separates ethics from economics or value from fact than does any economic system. However, unlike the Economics of Ahimsa, modern economics does *pretend* that it has nothing to do with values or ethics.<sup>10</sup>

Having briefly talked about the origins of industrial capitalism and its relationship to modern economics, let us move to the specific domains of production, distribution and consumption.

## **PRODUCTION**

The dramatic increase in productive power associated with the rise of capitalism has given rise to a fetish of productivity, an emphasis on endless production. The promise of production saturates the air everywhere. Thus for economists of almost all hues, technology has become an object of worship, yielding ever more commodities at lower and lower visible costs and enabling more consumption, hence a higher standard of living. The Ahimsa perspective I am discussing is the perspective of those civilizations that have borne the *invisible* costs of industrialization. It thus questions whether industrial civilization which in its present form is so reliant on technology that does violence to man and nature, is at all capable of being non-violent, or in balance with nature.

## *Technology*

Gandhi, commenting on Jawaharlal Nehru's socialist beliefs, once said "Pandit Nehru wants industrialization because he thinks that if it is socialized, it would be free from the evils of capitalism. My own view is that the evils are inherent in industrialism and no amount of socialization can eradicate them."<sup>11</sup> This is a fundamental difference between a Marxist critique of capitalism and a Gandhian critique based on Ahimsa. The Marxist view of machines as simply tools that can be put to good or bad use depending upon the social relations of production often seems reasonable to people like us who are so used to technology in our lives. By contrast Gandhi's views on technology have been attacked as being primitive and unrealistic. Even in Gandhi's own time his opposition to the violence of large-scale industry was unpopular to say the least. Although he did temper the radical views of his youth later in life, I would argue that his position is not based on a moral fundamentalism, as has been suggested, but on an understanding of the hidden costs, environmental and human, of modern technology.

Gandhi supported what has later been called appropriate technology or intermediate technology. Low cost, labor intensive rather than capital intensive, production that did not disturb nature's balance in a large way, did not have a large ecological footprint, you might say, although I don't particularly like that term "footprint". What is more, he made his general critique of machinery, very specific by proposing solutions to economic, social and political problems drawn from the Indian tradition. In the realm of production, he valorized the Indian handicraft industry and made the spinning-wheel or *charkha* the symbol of his activity. To the urban intelligentsia with a modern education, it was hard to believe that the subjugated and ruined Indian society had much of value to offer in terms of inspiration for how to organize industry in the modern age. Subsequent work by historians like Dharampal, have borne out Gandhi's views on many aspects of the socio-economic organization of Indian society.<sup>12</sup> Although the Nehruvian vision of large dams and massive state-owned industry triumphed in the official realm of policy, the Gandhian vision has survived to this day. It has provided the inspiration for micro-hydel projects that bring electricity to a few villages by constructing small check dams, for watershed management projects that attempt to replenish the groundwater in arid areas using low-cost technology etc and for many environmental struggles against the degradation caused by modern technology. This Ahimsa vision has also prompted some to look to the surviving Indian artisanal tradition for inspiration on how to organize production in a non-violent fashion. One example is the long neglected process of steel manufacture with small clay furnaces that was widely prevalent in North India but has since fallen into disuse. Of course it is not being suggested that we can use this process to supply the world's steel needs today. It is merely a lesson in how production has historically been organized in less violent ways and the resources that will still be available to humanity when the sweep of modernity is over.

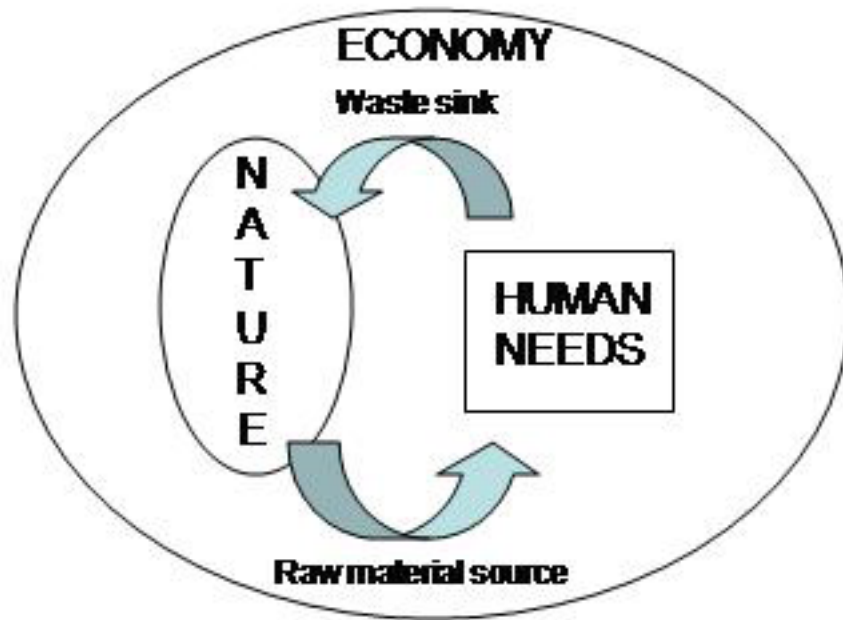
A second somewhat under-emphasized aspect of Gandhi's critique of the machine is regarding the nature of work in modern societies. Much has been said about the alienating nature of work under capitalism and the violence done to the human psyche as a result of deskilled, menial labor. For example, just the other day I came across this New York Times article that describes a call center job at MacDonald's

Corporation.<sup>13</sup> The worker whose job is to stare at the computer screen to process food orders for a minimum wage, has 1.75 seconds to respond to a red box that flashes on her screen as random intervals. This is to show that she is paying attention. Not surprisingly then, neoclassical economics regards work as a disutility, i.e. something that causes unhappiness and that is to be avoided as much as possible. A rational individual is supposed to maximize leisure time and minimize work. The Ahimsa perspective, in contrast, pays great attention to how man reacts to his own work and does not regard work as a chore. Kumarappa notes “Our daily round of duties is as much a part of ourselves as our physical body. Man expresses himself by his work and at the same time builds his personality by his acts...Hence the occupation we follow is not merely a means of earning our daily bread....”<sup>14</sup>

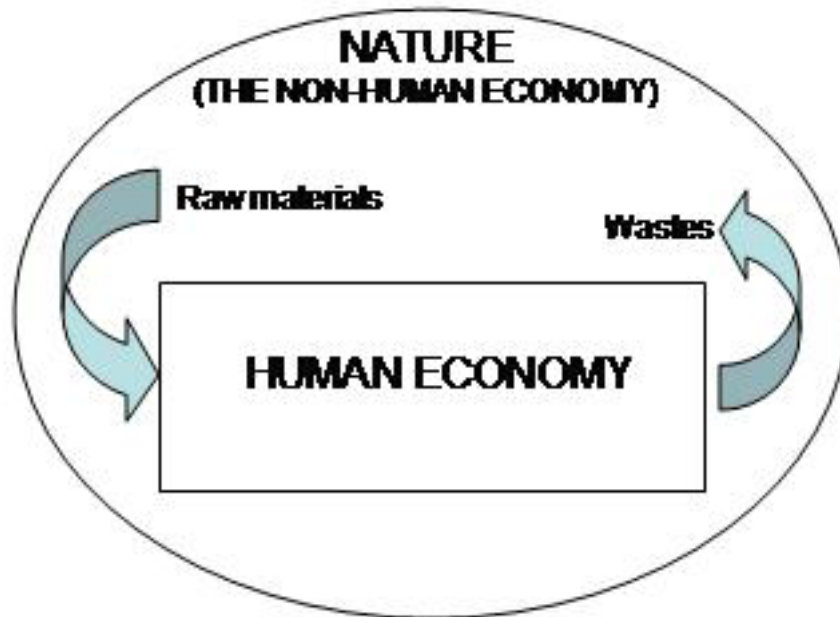
### *The deity of Economic Growth*

I don't want to leave the discussion on Production without saying at least a few words about Economic Growth. It is impossible to read newspapers today without noticing the ubiquitous measure of how fast an economy is growing, namely the growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product or GDP. The GDP, as many of you probably know, is the aggregate monetary value of all the goods and services produced in the economy in a specified time period. Its many defects have been repeatedly pointed out and are the stuff of textbooks. I won't go into them in any detail here. Despite all this GDP remains the most often used method of measuring the performance of an economy simply because it is convenient. Of course when we say that the GDP grew at 3% last year, there are two aspects of this figure that are important. The rate at which it grew, which is the 3% number, and the size over which it grew at that rate. As the ecological economists have pointed out, a 3% growth in an economy that already impacts nature in a big way, like the US economy, is very different from a 3% growth in a smaller economy, say of Uganda or Bangladesh. But not only that, the number also hides what it is that is growing. For a while after Hurricane Katrina had devastated the Louisiana coast, there was actually a debate about whether GDP growth would increase or slow down as a result of it. Increased pollution, devastated homes, deforestation can all contribute to GDP growth. Not only that, the Economy of Ahimsa that operates daily in our midst, caring for the old, nurturing the young, volunteer labor of all kinds, domestic unpaid labor are simply not accounted for in GDP.

It is clear to many that there is something wrong in paying all thus attention to GDP growth. As has been pointed out, the conventional view of economic growth results from a conception of the economy-nature relationship that looks something like this....,



while the Ahimsa view sees it more like this....



If we insist on infinitely growing wants, then not only will non-renewables like oil be scarce but so will renewables like water. The looming water crisis proves this. Of course if we point out the absurdity of expecting infinite growth on a finite Earth we are in danger of being labeled anti-poor. This is because the World Bank emphasizes growth as the principal solution to poverty. Since redistribution of existing resources is politically impossible, the only way to ensure bigger pieces of the economic pie for the poor is to make the pie larger.

Are there alternatives to measuring our economy's performance in terms of GDP? Some years ago the King of Bhutan, a small country in Asia bordering on India, suggested the concept of Gross National Happiness. Based on Buddhist spiritual values in the spirit of Buddhist Economics espoused by Fritz Schumacher, GNH recognizes that the spiritual or cultural growth of a society is as important as its material growth. Thus the four components of GNH are equitable and sustainable socio-economic development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment, and establishment of good governance. Measurement of GNH is now official policy in Bhutan, so far as I know the only country that does so. Here are some sources on this concept and of course, of the problems associated with it.<sup>15</sup>

## **DISTRIBUTION**

Distribution refers to the movement of inputs to producers and outputs to consumers. In an economy where production occurs purely for use, the problem of how to distribute does not arise because the producers of a good or a service are themselves the users. A completely materially self-sufficient individual or even family is a rarity and most societies have some form of exchange. The moment exchange enters the picture the producer is distanced from the consumer. The principle of local economy or *swadeshi* insists on minimizing this distance. Local economies have been discussed extensively as alternatives to globalization and I won't go into too much detail here for want of time. For Gandhi, *swadeshi* is a response to the capitalist global economy that results in colonialism and imperialism. As Lenin made famous in his pamphlet on Imperialism, the endless search for cheap raw materials, cheap labor and newer markets for manufactured goods is a prime cause for wars under capitalism.<sup>16</sup> The link between wars and environmental degradation can easily be imagined. *Swadeshi* emphasizes production for local use and consumption of locally manufactured goods in order to avoid the violence that accompanies international trade. The *Swadeshi* theory of trade is radically different from trade theories in neoclassical economics. The most famous one being the theory of comparative advantage that emphasizes mutual gains from trade purely in terms of greater consumption. Thus the neoclassical motto is "some trade is better than no trade". While the *swadeshi* motto is "no trade is better than exploitative trade".

The doctrine of *swadeshi* recognizes that the value of a good or service cannot be reduced to its price but that human and environmental conditions involved in its manufacture matter as much if not more. Anticipating the days of consumer awareness and local currency, Kumarappa had the following list of questions ready for all consumers: "What does one know about where the article comes from? Who

makes the article? From what material? Under what conditions do the workers live and work? What proportion of the final price do they get as wages? How is the rest of the money distributed?”<sup>17</sup> As can be seen, these questions are easier to answer for participants of an economy that produces mainly for the local market. Kumarappa explains the moral basis of *swadeshi* as follows. “Those of us who apply human standards of value (to production) have to inquire into all aspects of manufacture. It is an arduous task and it becomes almost impossible for ordinary persons to undertake it when the articles come from far off countries.”<sup>18</sup>

There are two common objections to *swadeshi*. First, it has sometimes been (mis)interpreted as an insistence on complete economic self-sufficiency for a nation or a community. *Swadeshi*, as conceived by Gandhi does not reject trade with other nations or communities in toto but it is opposed to an international order based solely on considerations of comparative advantage or a system that celebrates global trade for its own sake or for the sake of profit maximization (what is euphemistically called “competitiveness”). Second, like in Marxist economics, the principle of non-exploitation is part of the Economics of Ahimsa and it entails that the product of a worker’s labor is not appropriated by a capitalist or a landlord who has done nothing to produce it, but retained by the worker herself. Thus *swadeshi* is not simply capitalism with local capitalists instead of global ones but also calls for a change in the way in which production is socially organized.

Even if the will is present, serious questions still remain as to how a *swadeshi* economy can survive in today’s globalized world. With the Information and Communications Revolution of the 1990s and the relentless expansion of the neo-liberal model of economic organization, arguing for a *swadeshi* economy in 2006 seems anachronistic, even ridiculous. Nevertheless, interesting experiments are being carried out in local economy management and they serve as models for more such efforts. Some of you may be aware of the work being done on various aspects of local economy by folks at the Schumacher Society.<sup>19</sup> I will also briefly mention one such experiment being carried out in southern India, under the leadership of Rangaswamy Elango, in the town of Kuthambakkam.<sup>20</sup> Elango is working on establishing a land/agriculture-based local economy, along the lines of the Gandhi-Kumarappa model. By bringing together six neighboring villages into a cluster, many products that are consumed by the villagers can be produced locally. Elango estimated, through a detailed door-to-door survey by his team, that 5/6 of the commodities that Kuthambakkam consumes every month could be produced within the village and traded locally. While experiments such as Elango’s are by far the exception rather than the norm, they can still be an inspiration for anyone wishing to create alternatives.

## **CONSUMPTION**

*Utility maximization and capital accumulation or aparigraha?*

As we have already seen, in the context of economic growth, modern economics regards more material goods to be better. With this emphasis on growth in production naturally comes an emphasis on increasing consumption. Consumption is theorized in neoclassical economics under the name of the utility

maximization theory of consumer demand. We can think of utility as happiness. But greater utility is derived, in this theory, from the consumption of more commodities. The definition of a rational person, in consumer theory, is someone who derives greater happiness from consuming more subject to his or her budget constraint. Moreover, in this theory, the preferences of an individual are taken as given and unchanging. There is no recognition that an individual may modify his or her wants in accordance with extra-economic principles such as ethical or moral values. In contrast to utility maximization and ever-increasing wants, the Economics of Ahimsa emphasizes *aparigraha*, or non-possession as the ideal to strive for. *Aparigraha*, if I am not wrong, is an ancient concept in Jain spiritual thought, as indeed is Ahimsa. Gandhi summarizes the motivation for *aparigraha* thus in “Hind Swaraj”: “We notice that the mind is a restless bird; the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions the more unbridled they become.”<sup>21</sup> Simplicity and non-violence are closely related to caring for the environment. Producing a high degree of human satisfaction by means of a relatively low rate of consumption allows people to live without great pressure on the environment or on their fellow-humans.

It is important here to deal with two common objections. First, these thoughts may strike us as being too idealistic. It should be pointed out that we do not posit minimization of wants or renunciation of material comforts to be the only motivating force behind an individual’s actions. But neither are we willing to cede all economic acts to the domain of self-interest or rational greed. Here, as in *swadeshi*, what matters is a genuine desire to strive towards the respective ideals, knowing that one may never completely achieve them. Second, neither Gandhi nor Kumarappa glorified poverty, as they are commonly accused of doing. Rather than telling the poor to be happy in their poverty, they are telling the rich that more wealth will not bring greater happiness. Gandhi called poverty a sin and his system of political economy was intended to eradicate India’s poverty and bring about parity of wealth. Ajit Dasgupta, in his book on Gandhian Economics, has pointed out that “Doctrines calling for limitation of wants can easily be construed as an attempt at ideological justification of the status quo.”<sup>22</sup> However, even a preliminary reading of Gandhi should make it clear that he was anything but *status quoist*. His doctrine is rather “sarvodaya” or what we might call in modern parlance, “an exercise in the optimization of overall individual welfare.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, speaking on the theme of material and moral progress, Gandhi emphasizes that

“No one has ever suggested that grinding pauperism can lead to anything else than moral degradation. Every human being has a right to live and therefore to find the wherewithal to feed himself and where necessary to clothe and house himself. But, for this very simple performance, we need no assistance from economists or their laws... The only statement that has to be examined is whether it can be laid down as a law of universal application that material advancement means moral progress.”<sup>24</sup>

Needless to say Gandhi rejects the law that “material advancement means moral progress”.

### *Overconsumption and Sustainable Development*

Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the idea of Sustainable Development has become more

and more prominent. Sustainable practice is defined as that which meets the needs of current populations without endangering the prospects and livelihoods of future generations.<sup>25</sup> This definition of course begs the question, what constitutes the needs of today's populations. As Thomas Princen says in the book *Confronting Consumption*, the answer has remained "blurred, out of focus and even usefully ambiguous: everyone has become adept at talking about sustainability without having to wade into the treacherous waters of consumption."<sup>26</sup>

In the new era of global free trade, with its unprecedented levels of consumption, as more and more people adopt consumerist lifestyles in the rapidly industrializing third world, has made this issue more acute. We are all familiar with the neoliberal logic in question. Developing countries are encouraged to join the free market, to industrialize and grow as a solution to their poverty. As a result China and India, to name the two biggest, have seen GDP growth to the tune of 6-8% per year. Industrial production and consumption, of course, transforms nature, and the ecological impact of a society consisting of economic maximizers is large and poorly understood. Further, the neoliberal logic of free trade encourages environmental cost-cutting and shifting of production to poorer countries and to poor neighborhoods in rich countries. Also the developing countries are industrializing at a time when they do not have the luxury of new continents to settle, untapped market to exploit or endless nature to pollute. They are forced to cannibalize their own populations. Gandhi was an early dissenter against this madness which he clearly saw was coming.

Today in the rich countries, at least in some circles, frugality is back in fashion. The so-called voluntary simplicity movement (VSM) with its motto of simple living, restriction of wants and minimization of the burden we place upon the resources of the earth, is slowly gaining ground.<sup>27</sup> Cecile Andrews in his book, "The Circle of Simplicity" argues thus:

"A lot of people are rushed and frenzied and stressed...They are not laughing very much. But a growing number of people aren't content to live this way. They are looking for ways to simplify their lives."<sup>28</sup>

In the United States, there is a growing consciousness that a simplification of lifestyle can lead to greater happiness and fulfillment in life. It is true that such concerns and yearning for a simpler life hark back in the US at least to the days of Thoreau and the Concord Transcendentalists if not even earlier and one may question if there is any freshness left in the idea. However, the very existence of a mass movement with a solid middle-class involvement is an indication that ideas of simple living are gaining currency. Harvard economist Juliet Schor estimates that some 20% of Americans have, in recent times chosen to live on lesser incomes and are happy with the change. Half of these are households with annual incomes of \$35,000 or less. So we are not talking about the ultra-rich here.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, in absolute terms the number of people displaying this consciousness is rather miniscule but here it is worth remembering that millions of people living less industrialized or more traditional lifestyles do not take much from the earth in the first place. This is changing rapidly with Globalization. "If the four billion or more global underconsumers are to raise their consumption levels to some minimally rewarding

and secure level, the one billion or so global overconsumers will...have to make ecological room.”<sup>30</sup>  
There is the rub.

## CONCLUSION

Let me close with a few general observations. Whenever we criticize technology we open ourselves to allegations of primitivism, valorizing poverty etc. This is an obstacle to seriously questioning the violence of industrial modernity within the framework of modern economics. But the all-too-frequently-heard modernist criticism of Gandhian ideas, that they “threaten to turn the clock back” or take us into a “pre-Modern past” only makes sense within the modernist conception of progress but not if we reject it. Moreover the massive Eurocentric project of defamation that all traditional or non-modern societies have endured during the colonial period and after, makes it difficult today to retrieve useful aspects of socio-economic organization of pre-modern cultures. Eurocentrism is not simply the cognitive perspective of colonizing Europeans but rather the perspective of all those who are educated under its hegemony.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless fruitful attempts have been made in this regard specially in the past twenty or thirty years. I don’t have the time to talk about these specifically, but ask me later if you are interested.

In the foregoing pages I have tried to simultaneously critique the biases in modern economics in the domains of production, distribution and consumption, while attempting to present an alternative vision from the perspective of Ahimsa. Ahimsa can guide not only our individual actions in everyday life but also our struggle for making possible other worlds. This perspective also gives us new eyes to see the future in the present. Entire worlds of human activity not based on violence but instead on non-violent cooperation, on the logic of the gift and on caring become visible to us. The truth is that even with all its violence capitalism and industrialism never did conquer all domains of human activity, or even all aspects of economic activity. In answer to the rhetoric that “There is No Alternative Rhetoric” emanating from the centers of power we can say that not only are Other Worlds possible, they already exist here and now.

## NOTE AND REFERENCES

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2 Clive to Keynes: A survey of the history of our public debts and credits, Economy of Permanence: a quest for a social order based on non-violence, Why the village movement? A Plea for a village centered economic order in India, The Practice and Percepts of Jesus, Swaraj (self-rule) for the Masses

3 Schumacher E.F. (1973) *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (Harper and Row, New York 1973) p.33.

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5 Kumarappa J.C (1945) *Economy of Permanence* (Sarva-Seva-Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi, 1997), p.35-36

6 See Kanth R.K. (1997) *Breaking with the Enlightenment*, Humanities Press, New Jersey, esp. Chapter 5 for a critique of such Enlightenment views.

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9 The term “neoclassical” refers to a school of Economics that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and is associated with the names of Leon Walras, Alfred Marshall, as its early proponents. Walras and Marshall drew their basic framework regarding markets and their operation etc. from the classical economists (mainly Adam Smith and David Ricardo), but also extended the theory in substantial new directions. Neoclassical economics is distinguished from other major theories such as Keynesian and Marxian economics in its privileging of microeconomic decision making by firms and individuals, as opposed to more macroeconomic concerns (like inflation, unemployment etc). Production function, utility maximization, marginal analysis are some prominent theoretical tools of neoclassical economics. For introductory accounts see Wolff R.D. and Resnick S.A (1987) *Economics: Marxian versus Neoclassical*, The Johns Hopkins University Press.

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20 The information in this paragraph is taken from various online sources, e.g. see <http://www.indiatogether.org/govt/local/interviews/elango.htm>

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- 29 *ibid.*
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- 31 I owe this definition to Quijano A (2000) The Coloniality of Power and Social Classification, *Journal of World Systems Research* 6, no.2. Also for a comprehensive critique of the phenomenon of Eurocentrism, see Kanth R.K. (2005) *Against Eurocentrism: A Transcendent Critique of Modernist Science, Society and Morals*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.