

BACK TO BASICS

The Contemporary Relevance of J C Kumarappa's Life and Works

"It is the standard of the human personality that has to be raised and developed." —JCK

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JC Kumarappa, one of the tallest and most original thinkers in the Indian independence struggle theatre, is a sadly neglected activist scholar. This negligence is deliberate and is starkly shown by the fact that the post-1947 political leadership of the country never bothered to collect and publish his writings and document his activities. The Kumarappa papers in the manuscript section of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi are in a deplorable condition and there is an urgent need to preserve them and bring out his collected works.

The relevance of Kumarappa and his political leader, Gandhiji, in the present national and world situation is a growing phenomenon. What they said and wrote about such vital topics as peace and self-reliance are proving true in an uncannily prophetic sense. All those who are genuinely interested in the survival of the human race and the planet can no longer ignore the thoughts of J C Kumarappa, because his is a sane voice that articulated the serious maladies that confront the modern man and seriously tried to evolve solutions.

Though no conscious efforts were made by the new rulers after 1947 to popularise the writings of Kumarappa due to obvious reasons of his sharp divergences from the official policies and programmes of the new government, he did influence many thinkers in India and abroad. Conscious efforts were made to keep those ideas alive and point out their continuing relevance. Also, presently there is again a growing awareness of his relevance to contemporary issues that are day-by-day becoming more and more threatening.

NEHRUVIAN MODEL

Kumarappa was an incisive critic of what has come to be known as Nehruvian economics. He could clearly see that the economic policies promoted at the central and State levels would lead only to increasing dependency on imperialist forces, a far cry from genuine freedom, increasing the misery of the common man. Nehruvian economics was one of emphasis on heavy industry based on borrowed high technology, advisers, capital and unequal international trade. This policy was bound to generate lopsidedness and distortions and Kumarappa pointed this out at the very outset.

Nehruvian economics was in direct opposition to Gandhian economics and in post-'47 India, especially after the assassination of Gandhi, those who advocated self-reliance and village-centred development programmes were deliberately sidelined, while hypocritically invoking Gandhi and his thoughts. Kumarappa was one such thinker who

was cast aside by Nehru and his followers and that is why there is no official interest shown in what he said and wrote. At one point, when Nehru simply could not stomach the criticisms of Kumarappa on the question of development, he neurotically reacted by calling the most able lieutenant of Gandhi "a mad man". That was how much of a Gandhian Nehru was.

Kumarappa foresaw during the early years of 'independence' that the economic policies adopted by the Nehru government will bring forth devastation to the vast majority of the people and deepen the dependency of the national economy on external more powerful forces. One finds now that this prediction has been concretized during the decades that followed. The dependency on imperialist powers has become a highly complex web entangling every aspect of the economy and life of the people and even the smallest ripple in the imperialist financial centres has come to have immediate repercussions on the national economy.

When the British colonised India the country had sustainable agriculture and developing village industries as well as growing commercial towns with ancient trading histories, which the colonizers systematically proceeded to destroy. This ruthless process of destruction was based on the needs of British capital and industries which needed raw materials and markets for finished products. When raw materials are exported under discriminatory tax and tariff systems, or when finished products are imported without any protective duties, it is invariably at the cost of the national economies which are colonised. In fact, this is the very purpose and rationale of colonisation. They did it with efficiency using the social/political basis of parasitic local chieftains and landlords, and commission agents otherwise called comprador bourgeoisie. Unsustainable revenue farming drove the peasantry to levels of utter destitution. It is not at all surprising that the whole British period, especially the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries has gone down in Indian history as the age of famines. Millions of people starved to death during this period and the impact was obviously more in the rural areas.

Kumarappa and Gandhi understood the genesis of the dynamics of this destitution of the masses very well and that is why they were always harping on a village centred development planning once the colonialists left the country. Such a vision had sound economic rationale that went back to the traditional concepts of democracy and freedom adapted to suit the changed conditions nationally and internationally. Sustainability was taken as the cornerstone of development schemes and it was this cardinal principle that was thrown overboard by the national level dispensers after 1947. Whatever may be the imperfections and lacunae in this perspective of sustainability and self-reliance the intrinsic validity of these principles is clear. Subsequent developments have clearly brought this forth.

When the British handed over political power to the leaderships of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League and left the sub-continent, they also ensured that the pattern of development will be one of dependency on superior world forces. Moreover, the terribly weakened imperial power was being forcefully nudged by the main victor of the Second World War, who had unmistakably emerged as the economic and military superpower, the United States of America, to leave the Indian theatre open to exploitation by others too. Their calculations did not miscarry at all. Instead of being the jewel on the British crown India became jewels in the crowns of many imperialist powers which was a result of the changed balance of power globally after the two World Wars.

This process had begun decades before the British left the country, and by the time they formally left, the base was well laid out for accelerated exploitation of the country in a neo-colonial manner. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the full-blooded enthronement of a neo-liberal economic regime from the early 1990s onwards and the coming into being of a uni-polar world with the United States of America as the hegemonistic superpower, the regressive impact of dependency has multiplied, and it is in this background that the relevance of Kumarappa becomes even more notable.

The most pressing problem at the time the British left the country was the absolute poverty of the vast masses of people, more pronounced in the vast countryside, which was mainly the creation of colonial economic policies consciously geared to its capital accumulation needs of the imperialist metropolis. The horrendous Bengal famine in which millions perished due to lack of food and Calcutta streets littered with skeletal corpses was fresh in the memory of the people. A realistic evaluation naturally demanded the regeneration of the village economy on a priority basis, which unfortunately was not the agenda of the new rulers. Instead, they latched on to the apron strings of American capital and its global allies and reposed confidence in the so-called US 'experts', who simply did not know anything worthwhile about the Indian reality. Nehru's 'non-alignment' was only a ploy to bargain for more concessions and 'aid' from the Western bloc led by the US.

The US that had emerged as the most powerful economic and political power in the post-Second World War scenario understood very well the stupidity of trying to hold on to vast regions like India as directly administered colonies, and the very dynamics of capital accumulation discounted the political and economic costs of such outdated exercises. The British and other European countries' form of colonialism had clearly become redundant and even counterproductive with the two World Wars, while the strength of capital in the undamaged and tremendously booming US economy naturally gave rise to new, indirect forms of colonialism using the power of capital and exploitation of market as the main means. The policy of 'develop and control' became far more profitable and suitable for the scale of production of capital that an economy like that of a behemoth like the US required. This qualitative change in the nature of colonialism was originated and implemented under the leadership of the US. Using their tremendous leverage the US steamrollered its own development pattern on India, which basically catered to the insatiable appetite of its own young, strong and savagely aggressive capital. Thus entered various 'revolutions' into India going under the pet names of 'green,' 'white' and 'blue' revolutions; and presently there is the bio-technology revolution.

The balance sheet of the 'green revolution' itself is revealing enough. Within the last ten years more than 200,000 farmers have committed suicide unable to bear the debt burden, which itself is a product of the non-sustainability of this sort of agriculture as a viable economic proposition. These suicides have occurred predominantly in the green revolution areas including Punjab which is incessantly trumpeted as a great success story of the American intervention in Indian agriculture. Now it is the turn of genetically engineered agriculture to kill the producers (and consumers and other flora and fauna), something which has already commenced in several States. Kumarappa knew what was coming right at the time when American 'experts' were invited as VIPs by the Nehru government to make India into a land of milk and honey soon after independence. In his own violent non-violent manner he fought against it and characterized such moves as nothing short of being anti-national and anti-people.

Instead of creating a land flowing with milk and honey what has happened is an unprecedented widening of the economic inequalities within the country and the incessant flow of blood. After 1947 there has been a remarkable increase in the number of billionaires in the country. In fact, India can now boast of the largest number of super rich in the whole world. At the same time, or because of this, it is also one of the poorest countries of the world. More than 60 years after formal political independence almost 30% of the absolutely poor on the globe belongs to India. More than 70% of the total population survives on less than Rs 20 per day. Such abysmal poverty has to have a source of origin and perpetuation. One does not have to look far for it. The affluence of less than five per cent of the population and the thriving of several hundreds of the super rich of the world here is enough testimony to explain the seeming contradiction. Since 1947 India has 'grown' into a much fatter milch cow catering to international capital and their agents than during the colonial era. The political leadership of the country has ably facilitated this utter impoverishment and highly skewed economy through their imported 'development' model.

It may not be out of place to go into the details of the growing number of farmers' suicides. With the launching of the second Five-Year Plan (1956) the planning model had shed all earlier ambiguities and the state policy had identified itself with large-scale industries and related mega infrastructure building exercises. When Nehru was going gaga about the 'modern temples' of India the food security situation deteriorated further and further until the situation could not deteriorate any further by the first few years of the 1960s. Repeated distress requests from the Indian government to the US government for urgent food aid resulted in the shipping of cattle feed quality food grains, and that too was done after some arm twisting, under the Public Law 480 scheme. The US government made it very clear that it is sending the ship loads of waste on humanitarian considerations, thus assuming the role of a benevolent saviour to the Nehru government, which was facing endemic food riots promising to get escalated.

The US strategists, of course, knew that food is a highly volatile question with serious political implications and that the Nehru government was getting more and more muddled on this question, which will ultimately decide its political fate. It was this situation that gave the US a very powerful weapon to penetrate Indian agriculture for the benefit of its chemical giants and agricultural technology producers. It was not difficult for them to convince the Indian government that what is urgently required is changing the whole organisation of Indian agriculture by making it hybrid seed and chemicals dependent, which will result in rapid increase in food production. Subsequently, the first overseas office of the Ford Foundation was started in India. Ford Foundation experts trained the Indian agricultural scientists and economists in the theory and practice of the new agriculture, and water available districts were chosen as initial test cases for intensive agricultural activities in different States of the country. Western Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana in the North and districts like Thanjavur and Krishna in the South were chosen as test areas. In the initial phase of this so-called green revolution the areas chosen were all ones with sufficient water availability. This was a necessary pre-condition because the new technology agriculture is water guzzling by its basic nature.

Initially there were bulk imports of the agro-chemicals. Then the technology for the internal production of these inputs and the expertise along with the required capital had to be imported. The imported technology was either untested or outdated. Union Carbide is a classic illustration. It was a complete package and the local agents were the agricultural universities and colleges financed by the tax payers' money. As a macro-

economic indicator, cereal production increased considerably within 15-20 years after the launching of the new technology. But even then food security in many areas did not improve because of backward relations of production acting as a fetter on agricultural development and distributive injustices biased against the low income poor masses of people. The increase in mainly cereal production also did not ensure a balanced diet. This 'revolution' attained a plateau within 25 years and then started the downswing. The market conditions operated as the principal means by which the impoverishment of the primary producers-the tens of crores of disparate farmers-got institutionalized as an intensifying fixture on the agrarian scene. Rise in the prices of the factory produced inputs, depletion of the ground water levels and degeneration in the quality of available ground water, increasing energy costs, fast depletion of the soil nutrients resulting in the ever increasing input requirements to maintain the returns and the total lack of any sort of influence over the output markets by the producers dragged down the returns from agriculture making losses inevitable on an upwardly rising graph. At the same time, the profits of the agri-business corporations, of big traders and food processing industries registered impressive growth, which means that national and international multinational corporations and their ground level big agents grew at the expense of the farmers relentlessly pushing them into debt traps and suicides. It is the law of the jungle operating in the agrarian scene.

It is in this background of the ruin of green revolution agriculture that genetically modified seeds and related technologies are sought to be implemented in the country heralding such measures as the 'second green revolution' essential for eradicating poverty and malnutrition. The GM technology global giants like Monsanto and Cargill are again US based chemical giants, specializing in biological and chemical weapons, which are now out to conquer the vast agricultural markets by becoming seed and technology monopolies on a global level. In India agricultural universities are extending all possible help including putting at their disposal trial fields without bothering to study the economic, environmental and health impacts of GM technology. Any questions raised are answered by them in the words of the handouts given by the GM technology companies. The story is a repeat of the earlier 'green revolution.' Because these multinational corporations have invested hundreds of billions of dollars towards research and development of GM technology they need to find profitable markets, and India being a vast agricultural country is considered a prime market. 'Green revolution' has thrown up highly damaging consequences and even the much eulogized show pieces like Punjab are paying a very high price. Global agro-chemical giants now want more superprofits, which is very much in the logic of imperialist globalization, and nothing is held sacred on the altar of profits. J C Kumarappa could decipher the viciousness of this 'development' model in the early 1950s itself. Of course, GM technology had not emerged concretely during his life time, but his understanding of the dangerous implications of the new agricultural technology adopted wholesale by India clearly points at the futuristic tendencies too.

CAPITALISM, THEORY OF PRODUCTIVE FORCES, AND SOCIALISM

Capitalism and its structural continuity and emergence as imperialism and neo-imperialism are qualitatively different from the ancient empires and empire builders. The earlier empire builders were also looters but in a highly personalised egoistic manner. The loot was certainly also used to strengthen the military prowess for further conquests for more looting but the main difference was that these empire builders were adventurers who were greedy for the fabled riches of other peoples and places. They were not really pushed by systemic structural compulsions unlike colonialism and neo-colonialism

under the aegis of capital, which though personifying the interests of individual capitalists competing with each other, is an entity on its own with its own logic of expansion and survival or destruction. The logic of capital involves within itself cyclical as well as systemic long-term crises, which can easily result in depression conditions and wars both localised and worldwide. J C Kumarappa lived through two such large conflagrations enabling him to trace the genesis of wars to the intrinsic violence of capitalism.

Colonialism was essentially the quest for markets of both kinds—the market for cheap raw materials and the markets for finished goods manufactured in the metropolitan production centres, where the factory system had come into being. The development of industrial capitalism, large-scale production under the factory system, could survive only with the outward expansion of the outputs as well as ever growing feeders of raw materials. Competition makes the cheapness of both a necessary condition for survival itself, which means that irrational expansion of production and markets is systemic to capitalism. Unlimited expansion of the capitalist market is impossible, and this is true with regard to both direct colonialism and neo-colonialism. It is when the so-called normal methods of expansion of the production of capital reach a limit that countries go for wars, which are considered as the final solution to the structural problems of capital. The Second World War was such a perceived final solution. And it was subsequent to this that powerful global capital embarked on the path of neocolonialism in a full-blooded manner, though the ground was getting ready even before that. But this method of social management and social controls also is reaching its limits as is clearly being shown by the present ongoing conditions of recession in the whole world, which is showing signs of being long drawn out. In fact, the dimensions of the ongoing crisis are not limited to the crisis in the production and expansion of capital in a technical sense, but encompass diverse aspects of the planet, the most prominent among them being the environmental one, which is directly the result of the unbridled expansion of capital on a global scale.

J C Kumarappa's steadfast emphasis on the village economy including village industries is based on the sound analysis of the basis of the common good. Concentration of production in a few hands and the monopolisation of strategic resources like fossil fuels and minerals lead to violence towards nature as well as fellow human beings. This violence is the logical offshoot of the mode of production and production structure, and only radically changing both can be the solution. Self-reliance and sustainability are the effective antidotes to this intrinsic violence of the capitalist system and that is why, according to him, concentration should be on the villages, not on mega industrial projects and mega cities. His approach is well worth thinking about in the present situation of the accelerated destruction of capital, environment and human values. The world is witnessing heightened economic violence leading to unparalleled environmental and political violence.

The single-most powerful ideological tool to justify the unfettered expansion of capital and capitalist markets is the theory of productive forces. This theory of productive forces counterposes man and his needs to Nature, which ultimately threatens and wrecks the delicate balance of forces that is so much required for the survival of the planet and its inhabitants. The relationship between man and Nature is taken as hostile rather than symbiotic, from which it follows that to fulfil the needs of man Nature should be conquered/destroyed. Under the capitalist ethics of production there is no such thing as peaceful co-existence with Nature. It has always been a question of subjugating and

conquering Nature. Human needs are ever multiplying, and if they do not naturally multiply the imperatives of the production of capital will demise means to multiply them artificially. This is exactly what is going on now and only the scale is different from the earlier phases of capitalism. Colonialism was both a means and cause, although a crude one, of the expansion of productive forces in the interests of the production of capital in the imperial metropolises. Neo-colonialism made a qualitative and quantitative leap in this general scheme of capitalism engendering violence of an unprecedented nature across the world. Slavery and dispossession of the vast underprivileged masses of the world became a logical corollary, and this process is now hitting at the non owners of capital in the imperialist countries themselves. In other words, the crisis under conditions of neo-colonialism is fast assuming an all-round nature. The finger clearly points at the development model itself, which is based on superprofits and the fastest and maximum production of capital. Kumarappa was well aware of this development trap as is clearly shown by his incisive critique of the Nehruvian/American model adopted in India after 1947.

On a peripheral level, socialism as an economic, social and political ideological current came up as an alternative model to replace capitalism. The oppressive nature of capitalism and the acuteness of the contradiction between capital and labour catalyses the birth of socialism under which private property is sought to be abolished. Moreover, the ideologues of socialism and socialist revolution envisaged it as the prelude to the abolition of all disparities and inequalities in society and the state structure itself, which is called the stage of communism. This vision was idyllic and remains so today also. J C Kumarappa was an avid student of this ideological stream and he visited and wrote on post-revolutionary Russia and China. His enthusiasm was conditional because he could see the actual and potential violence of these new social systems because of bureaucratic centralisation, emphasis on large-scale industry and social management. Not surprisingly, his predictions came true within a fairly short period of time.

The degeneration of the socialist ideals as envisaged by its founders in the post-revolutionary countries is obviously not an accident or aberration. The ideological foundation by itself was not qualitatively different from that of the system it replaced. True, private property could be got rid off but only in a formal sense. What replaced the capitalist private property system was a statist ownership system in which the state and communist party bureaucrats, who did not really have any alternate vision of social management, did the social and economic management. The limited period during which the more obnoxious characteristics of private ownership of capital could be abolished can only be characterised as statist socialism and this could not be sustained because of the absence of an alternative development model firmly based on genuinely humanist ideals. The development model in its essence was the same as the capitalist model, a model that emphasised the growth of productive forces which means the ever increasing production of capital. The equally important, if not more important, aspect of social transformation, the radical overhauling of production relations, was relegated as inconsequential or even automatic. The Comintern's mechanical formulations and their imposition on the member Communist parties played a dominant role in this degeneration.

The Communist Party of India originated and grew under the wings of the Comintern, within which the domineering role was that of the Bolshevik party with its leadership personified in Joseph Stalin. During the 1930s and '40s and up to the dissolution of the Comintern the function of the member Communist parties was manipulated into one of

protecting the sectarian interests of the Bolshevik party and the Soviet state, especially its foreign policy. The leftist approach to Gandhi was dictated by the Comintern. They saw a difference between Gandhi's formulations and Nehru's approach, which was more conducive to the Western type of capitalist development. Marxism which originated and developed as a Eurocentric phenomenon treated Gandhian economics with unstudied hostility and contempt. It was a highly negative approach and the ready acceptance of handed down mechanical formulations only intensified and cemented this irrational negativity. Time and again this approach of the Leftists towards the nationalist leadership of the freedom struggle landed them in hopelessly awkward situations, but they never self-critically examined their own mistakes. Over the period of time when the Communist movement underwent splits and splits within splits the same attitude remains irrespective of organisational identities. Concepts like self-sufficiency and development of village economies as organically evolved units is something that is going backwards for them. Even the Maoists who are fighting against the dispossession of the Adivasis to facilitate the biggest land grab in modern Indian history do not have a genuine alternative to big industries. It is time that at least they take a look at what an organic intellectual like Kumarappa has got to say on such things.

On basic questions of industrialisation and production of capital there is no difference between, say, a business house like the *Tatas and the CPI or CPI(M) because both implicitly believe in the theory of productive forces*, notwithstanding that the development of the productive forces may be at the cost of the poor people or environment. That is why there is no Marxist ecology and environmental science worth the name. Their simplistic and erroneous solution to all the problems facing the country, from poverty to the caste system, is the development of productive forces. Serious problems that emerge when such a path is taken up are only minor side-effects for them and not to be taken seriously. Moreover, all those who clamour about environment, ecology and people's rights to livelihood are 'anti-development' and obscurantist. That is why where the social democrats are in power, like West Bengal and Kerala; their repressive organs are ready to shoot down the protesting poor people fighting for their basic livelihood. The present situation is such that every political party that has stakes in power, whether left, right or centre, is united on the question of the development model that increases poverty, dispossession, and inequality, destroys the environment and creates all round falsehood. People are witnessing the rising tide of popular resistance against this model. It is in this grim context that a rereading of Kumarappa's well-argued out writings becomes important.

Violence has become endemic. There are no qualms about deploying hundreds of thousands of armed personnel to chase out the Adivasis from their habitats because there are some minerals under the soil on which they live. When there is resistance the army and air force can be used to kill and drive them out. In present-day India, though now it is the turn of the original inhabitants so that space can be made for national and global big businesses to loot the rich common heritage of all the people for private aggrandisement, by and by it can be the turn of anyone who is not part of the ruling classes. The society is fast racing towards that point with democracy and development written large on rags advertising the glory of pimping. This is the development model that Kumarappa did not want and fought against. There is little wonder that the ruling classes want him and others like him to be buried deep. The official Left is also ever ready with spades to deepen the burial pits.

PEACE AND SELF-RELIANCE

There are any number of initiatives and organisations-both national and international-to decipher issues of peace and violence in the present global context of escalating violence against humans and nature and suggest possible ways out for the present terrible predicament of the planet and human kind. The violence being more and more intensified against Nature and humankind is getting more clearly identified as systemic in its basic character. Social control mechanisms are breaking down at an accelerated pace breaking open enormous space for violence of both discriminatory and indiscriminatory kind. At the root of this predicament is the greed of the big businesses with state structures acting as their facilitators. Anarchy of production in general and production of capital in particular is reaching unprecedented levels because of the abandonment of what is called the Keynesian model of attaining economic stability, which gave a decisive role to the state. During the 1980s and '90s this role was sought to be abandoned with the mantra of leaving everything to the market with no state interference. This meant massive cutbacks in social welfare expenditures and the campaign for the dogma called neo-liberal economic ideology through the acceptance of which the Western advanced capitalist countries tried to overcome the situation of recession-inflation combined. This campaign subsequently also spread to the third world countries including the poorest of the poor like sub-Saharan African countries and India. The objective of this campaign, which was sponsored and executed worldwide by the top 500 multinational corporations, was to make it into a global ideology. By the middle of the first decade of 2000 they temporarily succeeded in their goal.

India also took up this economic ideology as the official policy in the beginning of the 1990s. What people are seeing now are the wages of this neo-liberalism. And as is clearly shown by the ongoing global economic crisis the function of the state is only to facilitate what is known as 'bailing-out' big businesses, especially in the financial capital sector. Needless to say, this is at the common man's expense. It is nothing but canalisation of socially available capital to salvage an economic order that stops at nothing when it comes to the fastest means to produce capital, and which creates large-scale misery, ever increasing imbalance in Nature and mind-boggling levels of inequality and crime encompassing every conceivable field. A self-sufficient, self-reliant economic philosophy which caters to the maximum comfort of the maximum number of people is clearly the opposite of this anti-human 'development' model, which caters solely to the profit-making machines called multinational corporations and their agents. This is where the relevance of someone like J C Kumarappa comes in.

Kumarappa's vision of self-reliance and sustainability was not conceived as islands in themselves. Village economy did not certainly mean agriculture alone. It also involved village industry primarily based on locally available raw materials, research and development catering to the needs of the people; education for all which will also be centred on village crafts, trades and industry, cultural development like abolition of caste discrimination, and a whole host of other measures, which will all together result in the holistic empowerment of the people. He not only wrote and talked about this scheme but also tried to put it into concrete practice to be shown as prospective models for implementation on a wider scale. When it comes to the national economy his view was that there should be no international trade in items that are very necessary to the people. Also, there should be no over exploitation of what he called the reserve economy, which is composed of nature given non-renewable resources like minerals, fossil fuels etc. They are not commodities to be traded for non essentials like luxury goods for the affluent or capital goods for mega projects. Obviously they are not just meant for one

generation but for the coming generations also. That is why they are 'reserves' and should be exploited very judiciously. This also means that these reserves should not be allowed to be the means for private aggrandisement. Whatever exploitation of these resources is done should be in the public domain subject to close scrutiny.

Why did the US attack Iraq? For fossil fuel. It was when Iraq started trying to take its oil away from the truncated dollar and broadbase the trade of this natural resource linking it to other international currencies like Euro and Yen hoping to obtain better exchange deals that the US oil giants exerted constant pressure to invade the country and manufactured the so-called political reasons, which were subsequently proved outright lies. In the first place, the US consumes a disproportionately huge amount of fossil fuels, which itself is a prime reason for global warming having disastrous consequences for the planet. And it was the US that promoted oil based economic growth in the war ravaged economies of Europe and Japan which subsequently spread to the whole world. Thus oil became a strategic resource whose monopoly in turn decides who will dominate the world. This is creating wars and destruction of an unprecedented nature. It is not only in Iraq or Afghanistan that fossil fuels have led to violence, but wherever new oil and gas basins are discovered there is bloodshed and tension engineered by the superpower. Many African countries where there is oil are being torn by civil disturbances which often turn violent. Currently peace in the world is crucially dependent on reduction in the consumption of fossil fuels, which are being over exploited on a reckless scale. Kumarappa said that oil is a reserve resource, the consumption of which ought to be kept at the bare minimum. Recognising the grave perils of such recklessness the people of the world should recognise the need to voluntarily reduce the consumption of oil to the bare minimum and seriously move towards maximum possible use of 'current,' that is, renewable energy resources.

There are many who call such a worldview utopian and completely out of sync with reality. If a village can be self-reliant for its living needs, a country can also be. This is not isolationism. There will be trade but what commodities are to be traded and under what terms is the main thing. But for this self-reliance to happen, reduction of needs is a precondition. But what is happening now is that the spin doctors of businesses create needs which are frivolous and very often totally wasteful and even harmful. The advertisement industry is one of the biggest money spinners on a global scale and the entire thing serves only to generate more and more profits to big businesses through wasting huge resources. This is the typical hallmark of modern capitalism which seeks to produce capital by wasting capital.

Those who are calling Kumarappa's 'villagism' as utopian should open their eyes to what is happening to the Indian villages. Since 1947 more than 50 million poor people have been uprooted from the villages in the name of mega projects and this process is only getting strengthened. Apart from this forcible uprooting a much larger number has been displaced by sheer force of the economic, market dynamism. Where do these people go? They crawl into the already overcrowded urban centres looking for bare means to survive. There they either live/die on the streets or in hopelessly unhygienic slums on a miserable pittance breathing in the foul air and surviving on scraps. Indian cities, like all third world ones, are horrendously ugly monstrosities inhuman to the extreme. This is what 'development' is doing to the multitudes. Self-reliant beautiful villages in the midst of verdant nature, not villages that exist for the conveniences and pollution by urbanites, are the need of the hour. Only they can prevent the present sliding down into the bottomless abyss. No amount of sophistry in economic calculations

unrelated to the broader reality can ever hope to save the situation. Talk about high growth rates and economic superpower is sheer humbug to fool the gullible. India remains poor and its poverty is hyperbolically shooting up.□□□

[This is the introduction to Odyssey's forthcoming publication, "Back to Basics : A J C Kumarappa Reader"]