
*Prabhat
Rainjan
Sarkar*



*On
Economics*

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P. R. SARKAR
ON
ECONOMICS

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Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar on Economics

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On Economics



"Everyone wants to attain freedom, to be liberated from all sorts of bondages. Human beings can be liberated from certain bondages temporarily, but after a while those bondages return again.

We cannot ignore the external world, we cannot live without money. To attain temporary liberation from pains and miseries, money is required but to attain permanent liberation, we need the Supreme liberation."

"I want every human being to be guaranteed the minimum physical requirements of life; every human being to get scope for the full development of his or her intellectual potentiality; every human being to get equal opportunity to attain the Truth."

"This never ending effort of proper economic adjustment must ceaselessly continue at all times with a view to assisting the spiritual, mental and physical evolution of humanity. Let humanity develop a cosmic sentiment for a cosmic ideal and world fraternity."

P.R. Sarkar



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The Parts of an Economy

To begin with Sarkar expands economic thought and recategorizes it into four parts. He calls these the People's economy, Psycho-economy, the Commercial economy, and the General economy.

People's Economy

"This part of the economy will deal with the essential needs of the people, in general their production, distribution, marketing, shopping, storage, pricing, sales, freight charges, proformat costing and all related activities. Most importantly, it is directly concerned with the guaranteed provision of minimum requirements like food, clothes, housing, medical care, education, transportation, energy supply and the supply of irrigation waters. The continuous improvement and ready availability of these essentials is a key factor in people's economy.

Minimum requirements must be assured through guaranteed purchasing power which should be enshrined in the constitution as a fundamental human right or as a cardinal human right. This will give the citizens of the country power to sue a government if their minimum requirements are not met. Hence the necessity of people's economy will be reinforced by constitutional power.

As people's economy will deal with minimum requirements and people's subsistence problems, it must take precedence over other parts of the economy. For example, if people have no food and are starving, it may be necessary to establish short term uneconomic industries to supply food. In normal conditions such industries would violate the logic and demands of

general economic principles and principles of supply and demand.

People's economy should be also concerned with the development of small-scale industries, both private and cooperative. Private industries would be limited in size and scope to prevent monopoly production and exploitation, and would be required to function as cooperatives once they grew too large. Cooperative industries are the best means of organizing people in an independent manner so that they take collective responsibility for their livelihood.

People's economy may deal with employment for all, the eradication of mass poverty, rural economy, the phase-wise socialization of land into the hands of those who work physically or intellectually for proper production, practical training programs to impart specific skills to enable people to find employment in their immediate urban or rural locality, work placement, and the transportation, transshipment and loading and unloading of any materials, even if they are not economically viable. Another important aspect of people's economy may also be concerned with power, water and energy supply, as small-scale and cheap power and water production is essential if people are to have complete control over their economic lives. Finally, people's economy may further deal with economic decentralization, "people's power" and co-operative dynamo, and block-level planning."

Thus People's economy is concerned with the provision of minimum requirements of life. It is important to note here that Sarkar is not advocating a welfare state; rather what is important is the creation of meaningful employment. However, as mentioned earlier, Sarkar does not believe that the end-all of human life is economic life; instead it is the pursuit of intellectual and spiritual development, the creation of a good society.

Psycho Economy

The psycho-economy is concerned with increasing the psychic pabula (perspective, purposes) of the individual and the group through appropriate economic activity.

"While people's economy will be the main concern of poor and undeveloped economic units, psycho-economy will gain increasing importance once the problems of subsistence are gradually solved. Thus psycho-economy would be of major importance in a highly developed and mechanized economy where people may only work a few hours a week and have a lot of spare time.

Psycho-economy will have two branches. The first one will endeavor to eradicate exploitative and unjust economic practices, behaviors and structures. It will counter all economic and psycho-economic exploitation, and make people aware of how capitalists in their singular or collective roles exploit society through their gigantic propaganda machinery, and create unhealthy, artificial demands which not only poison the mind but encourage dangerous habits detrimental to psychic sanctity and expansion. The first and foremost duty of psycho-economics is to wage a tireless struggle against the degenerating and dehumanizing economic trends in society.

The second branch of psycho-economy is to develop and enhance the psychic pabula of the individual and collective minds. This branch is virtually unknown to economists today, but it will become an extremely important branch of economics in the future when mundane economic problems have been solved. Psycho-economics will add to the glaring glamor of economics. Psycho-economics will find creative solutions to economic problems to nurture the maximum utilization of psychic and spiritual potentialities in creation.

Psycho-economy includes the growth of balanced economy, the selection of production items, allocation decisions, the creation of proper work environments, the application of east-west theory, full employment policies, workers' participation and control over production and distribution, economic independence for women, incentive policies, psychological factors in progressive rationalization, psychological and sociological dimensions of economic development, the implementation of technology to increase production and reduce working hours, quality of life issues, business ethics, and moral and ethical principles and practices for effective cooperative management."

Commercial Economy

This branch of economics, according to Sarkar, will be concerned with questions of productivity. Commercial economy is similar to present understandings of economics.

"This part of the economy will develop scientific, efficient methods of production which will not incur loss, and where output will exceed input. The aim of commercial economy is maximum utilization and rational distribution of the resources of the universe. It includes the selection, production, and distribution of cash crops, inter-zonal and intra-zonal trade policies, export-import policies, rationalization of organized marketing systems, fixation of profit rates, cost accounting, licensing policies, technology transfer policies, technical quality control, management of balance of trade and payments, capital formation and loan policies, government intervention, monetary and fiscal policy, banking, capital supply, the barter system, the international monetary system, the organization of commerce, the planning of both agrico and agro-industries, and non-agricultural industries."

General Economy

This aspect of the economy and economics is concerned with the history of economic thought and a comparison of the various economic theories—among others, capitalist, socialist, and PROUTist. PROUT, for example.

"... is based on a three-tiered economic structure—large-scale key industries managed as public utilities; the cooperative economic sector; the largest sector in a Proutist economy; and small-scale concerns owned privately, as partnerships or as corporations. Key industries will function on a 'no loss no profit' principle.

General economy may also include economic infrastructure, coordination of economic planning at all levels, block-level planning, future planning, population policy, employment policy, full-employment policy, agro-industrial policies, socialization of the economy, development of

cooperative organizations, the banking system, how to increase purchasing capacity, macro and micro-economic problems, tax structure, urban and rural development, decentralization, classification of the three-tiered industrial structure, defence planning and expenditure, national or zonal budgeting, the application of appropriate technology and economic progress."

Capitalism and Communism

While the previous section developed the four main parts of the economy, this next section will attempt to critique the capitalist and communist discourses, the theories, the practices and texts that constitute these two monumental and dominant economic worldviews of the past few centuries.

Sarkar first explains the values embedded in capitalism.

“The impetus from crude psychic urges gave birth to capitalism. In capitalism the psychology of the acquisition of material wealth, be it land, money, metal or other property, strongly pre-dominates. Such crude psychic urges and psychic pabula remain unchecked and unbridled in capitalism and turn into a hungry profit-motive in the market system. As a result, traders, industrialists and business people suffer from the psychic disease of accumulating more and more wealth by any means, even to the point of depriving other human beings of their basic requirements.

Those dominated by these hungry psychic urges or psychic pabula run after material gains and do not hesitate to exploit others mercilessly. Exploitation starts at the point where one violates the principle of Aparigraha (non-indulgence in those amenities and comforts which are superfluous for physical existence) and accumulates more physical wealth than one actually needs for survival and progress in the world. The

exploiters forget the basic truth that this material world is very limited, whereas psychic pabula are propelled by an unlimited urge. When unlimited pabula are let loose in the limited material world, exploitation starts. A few become rich and others become poor. In such a condition millions die without food, live without shelter, work without education, suffer without medicine and move without proper clothing. The society then splits into two distinct groups-haves and have-nots. The former is the class of exploiters-the capitalists-and the latter is the class of the exploited-the disgruntled workers or Viks' ubddha Shu' dras.

So the unchecked psychic urges, and the psychic pabula for material acquisition end in merciless exploitation. This inhuman exploitation causes the mass-level deprivation of millions of people. The curse of capitalism engulfs the whole of society. Thus capitalism is anti-human."

However, this does not mean that Sarkar supports communism.

"Communism is also a socio-economico-political theory based on materialism. In communist society people's psychic urges and psychic pabula instinctively run after material acquisition and crude enjoyment. When psychic pabula are guided by a materialist outlook, human beings develop negative behavior patterns. For example, they become extroversial in nature, develop strong attachment to material wealth and worldly pleasure, become aggressively intolerant of other's views and thoughts, resort to brute force to repress opponents, deny the existence of spirituality and suppress the psychic urges or pabula of the people. Communist society suffers from all these evils.

In such a defective society, life loses its dynamism, the power of imagination gets shadowed and the urge for initiative is weakened. Thus, communist society sinks into a state of doldrums. The state of doldrums then further degenerates into a state of Babel's pandemonium through a process of capillary attractions. Today communist society is heading towards this inevitable, tragic end."

From Sarkar's perspective both capitalism and communism are not the solutions to the global crises facing humanity today; rather they are the problem.

"Both capitalism and communism are anti-human. Under both these systems psychic urges and pabula, instead of being properly channelized, are involved in detrimental physical, psycho-physical and psychic interactions, causing Prati-saincara or negative movement in the mind.

In capitalism the rich, in their affluence, misuse their psychic urge and direct their psychic pabula to the pursuit of material gains. And the poor, in their extreme poverty, misguide their psychic urges and concentrate their psychic pabula on anti-social activities in their struggle for existence. In communism, the elite and party leaders misuse their psychic urges and direct their psychic pabula towards political manipulation and totalitarian repression. Under the oppression of communist rule the psychic pabula of the general people are suppressed into a state of doldrums.

In both cases psychic urges are misutilised for sub-human activities in the physical, psycho-physical and psychic spheres."

General Principles of PROUT

Given Sarkar's reconstitution of economy and economies, as well as his critique of both capitalism and communism, what then are the principles and values that inform Sarkar's preferred system, PROUT?

First we must define ownership. While capitalism rests ownership with the individual, and communism with the State, Sarkar does not believe that property can in fact be owned at all.

"We should not forget even for a moment that this whole animate world is a large family in which nature has not assigned any property to any particular individual. Individual ownership has been created by selfish opportunists so that they might take advantage of the defects of this system in order to grow fatter in a parasitic way. When the whole property of this universe has been inherited by all creatures, how then can there be any justification for a system in which someone receives a flow of huge excess, while others die for lack of a handful of grain?"

However, Sarkar does not advocate the abolishment of personal property. It is the hoarding of wealth that is the problem. Thus he believes that localities, regions and federations must establish ceilings and floors.

"The universe is the common property of all. All people have usufructuary rights, that is, the right of enjoyment, but no one has the right to misuse this

common property. Those who gather much wealth and hoard it directly curtail the happiness and convenience of others in society. Their behavior is flagrantly anti-social. Therefore no one should be allowed to hoard wealth without the permission of society."

For Sarkar, different regions should establish various ceilings of property use, but there should never be any limits to psychic and spiritual development, intellectual liberty, spiritual freedom; in addition, the right to free movement throughout the world.

"In this socio-economic set-up human beings are at full liberty in the spiritual and mental spheres. This is possible because the spiritual and psychic entities for which people can aspire are themselves unlimited, and the extent of possession in this sphere does not hamper the progress of others in their quests. But supply in the physical sphere is limited, and hence any effort for disproportionate or unrestricted acquisition of physical objects has every possibility of creating a vast majority of have not's and thus hampering the spiritual, mental and physical growth of the larger majority. So while dealing with the problem of individual liberty in the physical sphere, liberty must not be allowed to cross a limit where it is instrumental in hampering the development of the complete personality of human beings."

"Let everyone enjoy as much as they like on the subtle mental plane. Let everyone possess as much mental and spiritual wealth as possible. Really speaking, both physical and mental cravings are born of mental hunger. It is certainly possible to transform the craving for physical enjoyment into intellectual hunger by channeling it toward a different goal through proper education. Human society today is badly in need of such education."

PROUT regulates the accumulating of wealth over certain boundaries and it legislates basic necessities.

"The availability of minimum essentialities of life plays a vital part not only in achieving world fraternity but also in the development of the human personality. This should be tackled on a world footing and should be based on certain fundamental presumptions. Every human being has certain minimum requirements which must be guaranteed to him or her."

Guaranteed availability of food-stuffs, clothing, medical assistance and housing accommodation should be arranged so that people may be able to utilize their surplus energy (energy up till now engaged in procuring the essentialities of life) in subtler pursuits. Side by side, there should be sufficient scope for providing other amenities of the progressive age. To fulfill the above responsibilities enough purchasing capacity should be created."

At the same time, however, Sarkar believes there is an need for a dynamic, an incentive structure.

"If the supply of requirements be guaranteed without any conditions of personal skill and labour, the individual may develop the psychology of idleness. The minimum requirements of every person are the same, but diversity is also the nature of creation. Special amenities should therefore be provided so that the diversity in skill and intelligence is fully utilized, and talent is encouraged to contribute its best for human development. It will, therefore, be necessary to make provision for special emoluments which can cater for special amenities of life according to the age and time. But at the same time, there should be a constant effort to reduce the gap between the amount of special emoluments and the bare minimum requirements of the average individual. The guaranteed supply of minimum requirements must be liberalized by increasing the provision of special amenities pertaining to the age and also simultaneously bringing about a decrease in the provision of special emoluments given to a few."

Economic Balance

So far we have presented Sarkar's four-fold division of economies, his critique of Capitalism and Communism, and the basic principles of PROUT. We now turn to perhaps the key problem in the world-economy today, that of the disparity between rich and poor within nations and between nations. Sarkar does not see the Developed world has necessarily progressed, as "progress" for him can only be defined in terms of intellectual and spiritual development, not aggregate goods and services consumed. For Sarkar, the key explanatory concept is balance, or Prama.

"Nature has been beautiful to each and every region of the world and has endowed enormous wealth both on and under the surface of the earth. In fact, different areas of the world are full of agricultural, mineral, aquatic, medicinal and forest resources, yet in many economic regions of the world there abound utmost poverty, low standard of life and cultural and industrial backwardness. As a result, carrying the curse of acute scarcity of food, clothes, accommodation as well as lack of educational facilities, millions of people today in 20th century, when material science claims to have made strident progress, are now fighting for their physical survival. There is no shortage of physical wealth in any economic region because of the blessings of nature. But due to the lack of benevolent propensities those materials could not be utilized for social and economic development. In consequence, the basic physical necessities of people (food, clothes, accommodation, medical treatment) could not be fulfilled. So there is eventually large scale want of "Prama" in physical sphere."

The world as we know it today is rooted in injustice, in imbalance. Capitalism and Communism are theories that serve to legitimize these injustices. Sarkar graphically describes these conditions.

"What we see in the market place and railway stations is the exhibition of half-clad street beggars and lepers — all stretching out their begging bowls, the only means of earning their livelihood. They are fortunate if anybody contemptuously flings a copper coin at them. The old blind beggars wait all day long at the bridge and lift their bowls as soon as someone walks past them. Their shrill cries fall on deaf ears only. On the other hand, the affluence of foods kept ready in luxurious houses to entertain the big guns of society ridicules the present human civilization."

"People of a particular country die of starvation, and people of another country die due to overeating, due to indigestion. This disparity is a creation of selfish men, not of nature, not of the Supreme Consciousness. All are equal, with equal glamor as human beings."

For the materially poor of the world, in particular, the injustices are cleverly camouflaged.

"The ills perpetrated in society are in a great measure created by the exploiters themselves. To swell their bank balances the exploiters create an artificial scarcity of food, clothes and other necessary consumer goods, and loot profits in the black market. Those who have no buying capacity for high-priced food and clothes take to stealing and other shady methods in order to meet their bare necessities. These ill-fed, ill-clad flocks of poor wretches work for these greedy black marketeers and smugglers. When apprehended, it is they who are penalized—the rich escape on the strength of their influence. Throwing their conscience to the four winds, these poor wretches take to sin and crime still more desperately. The society accuses these sinners and criminals, while the rich exploiters enact the roles of popular leaders, wear garlands, let loose a fireworks of speeches and exhort the masses with a clarion call to make more sacrifices."

Thus, it is not that there is scarcity of resources, rather it is the misuse of resources that creates suffering.

"It must always be remembered that the value of money lies in its use. If more money is accumulated than is necessary, it becomes valueless for lack of use. The money you keep idle and valueless makes you responsible for the injustice done to the hungry and the naked. Your valueless hoard

shall have to be made valuable by providing opportunities for others' use."

Money, for Sarkar must be reinvested productively, with a concern for the public, not for national prestige or fame.

"...economics teaches that the 'rolling of money' should never be blocked by any sort of non-productive investment. Sometimes it is found that business persons misuse loans to construct an unnecessary building for their business or a new show-room, and thus prevent the possibility of reinvesting the capital and increasing their wealth. Economics teaches that money taken on loan for investment in business should always be utilized for that purpose, and should never be utilized in any unproductive venture. Thus the investment of foreign loans, for example, should never be used in constructing large railway stations instead of constructing railway lines."

Banking, too, must be organized for the people.

"First a system of banking should be organized in such a way that the life of the average people will not be jeopardized by the demonic greed of the banks. In the past in most countries of the world, banks forced people to pay exorbitant interest rates. Even today this still takes place, not only in undeveloped countries but also in developing and developed countries. Violation of this point could bring ruination not only to low and middle income groups but also to the wealthy sections of society."

Self - Reliance

To counter the efforts of capitalists, Sarkar argues for "self-reliance", a model based on a cooperative structure where development leads to the realization of the needs for local economies.

"But for this industrial revolution we must not depend upon the raw materials brought from foreign countries. You should remember that the development of any country must not depend on imported raw materials. For this development we must utilize the indigenous raw materials - materials available within the country itself. Those who love society, those who love the people of the country and are keen to bring about socio-economic elevation of the country, must think in terms of an industrial revolution based on the raw materials available in their own economic unit."

And:

"We cannot neglect a single creature, nor can we ignore any particular part of this world. Therefore it is desirable to pursue the policy of decentralization in the management of industry as much as possible. The promotion of industry in one part of the world cannot eradicate either poverty or unemployment in any other part. So it is desirable to form self-sufficient units one by one, to produce the essential commodities of life, at least in the fields of agriculture and industry. Otherwise, people may have to face tremendous hardship and misery during war and other abnormal circumstances. With the development of transport facilities, we can increase the scope of these units."

However, as opposed to other self-reliance perspectives, Sarkar is not anti-technology or anti-growth (he does not believe that population is the cause of underdevelopment or overdevelopment as previously illustrated). For him, technology depends on the structure of the economy and on the culture of the society, whether it is materialistic or spiritual.

“Under a capitalist framework, [mechanization] means more misery and unemployment for the common people. Doubling the yield by using a machine will decrease the required number of laborers by half; consequently, capitalists will lay off laborers mercilessly. The unemployed laborers are ruined, bit by bit, by poverty and hunger. A few of them try to keep their souls and bodies together by indulging in theft, corruption and other antisocial activities. This situation is certainly not desirable. No such reaction is possible in a collective economic system. There, mechanization will mean less labor and more comforts. With a double increase in productivity of machines, the working hours will be reduced by half.”

This half reduction in working hours may be further reduced in the future.

“The proper use of science under a collective economic system will only bring about human welfare. It may well be possible that due to mechanization no one will have to labor for more than five minutes a week! Being not always engrossed in anxiety about food and clothes, humanity will not misuse its mental and spiritual wealth. People will be able to devote more time to sports, literary discourses and spiritual pursuits.”

One area where self reliance is particularly important is agriculture. Sarkar presents suggestions on how the structure of agriculture can be transformed so as to achieve self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

“According to PROUT, first land holdings must be economically viable to facilitate increased production. Here an economic holding means a holding where the minimum input brings the maximum output. It is not possible to predetermine the size of an economic holding, because factors like the fertility of the soil, climatic conditions, etc. in relation to input, output, productivity, etc. will determine the optimum size of the holding. Today many people believe that increased production is possible if land

holdings are small. But this thinking is defective because production is increased only when farm managers take correct, timely decisions. If managers are very efficient, then even very large farms can increase production. Of course, it is not necessary that all farms should become large. The main thing is that the holdings should be economically viable.... Economic holdings should comprise land of the same topography, have uniform irrigation and other standardized facilities. The size of economic holdings should be progressively increased keeping all these factors in mind. Thus the size of economic holdings will vary from country to country."

Agriculture cannot flourish under a capitalist system.

"In PROUT's agricultural system there is no place for intermediaries. Those who invest their capital and derive a profit from the productive labour of others are capitalists. Capitalists thrive on the blood of industrial and agricultural labourers like parasites. Those who act as intermediaries in the agricultural sector are agricultural capitalists. They get their land cultivated by others but they misappropriate the produce of the land."

This is not to say the mechanization is unimportant.

"PROUT advocates maximum modernization in agriculture and industry. In the cooperative agricultural system modern equipment must be utilized. Such modernization will facilitate increased production."

The key, again, however, is self-reliance, and jobs for local people, (those who have the financial, historical, and cultural interests as primary are considered local).

"PROUT advocates a decentralized economy, so policies must be adopted to utilize all local resources to accelerate and diversify development. This will ensure development throughout a country, and not just in a few regions. To achieve this aim, people must first be employed in agricultural co-operatives. In modern India there are two kinds of places-in one place there is surplus labour and in the other there is deficit labour. However the very concept of deficit labour is a relative one. Where there are inadequate opportunities for proper economic development, there is

surplus labour. All undeveloped economic regions are areas of surplus labour. When surplus labour moves to another region, then the undeveloped region has every chance of remaining undeveloped forever. According to PROUT top priorities must be given to finding employment for surplus labour in undeveloped regions. This policy will raise the standard of living of the people in the undeveloped area. If this policy is not implemented and surplus labour is allowed to move to other regions, and the Marxist policy that "Those who sow shall reap" is followed, then all tea plantations, coal mines and other natural resources will be controlled by outside labour. Local people will lose control over their natural resources. This is a very dangerous situation. PROUT's policy in this regard is very clear. The children of the soil must have priority in employment opportunities. As long as there is not full employment for local people, every effort must be made to employ them. Until the local labour is fully employed, no new development programs should be started. Scandinavian countries did not commence any new development programs for this reason. While creating employment of the local people, consideration must be given to local sentiments. For instance, in certain provinces of India there is surplus intellectual labour. People who are included in this category are ready to work as clerks for the low monthly wage of Rs. 30/- but they are not prepared to work as porters and earn more money. The problem of surplus intellectual labour is a special one and should be solved in a proper way. In industries in such regions with surplus intellectual labour the less physical labour employed the better. Thus development programs should be formulated according to time, place and person of different socio-economic regions."

While Sarkar does not spend a great deal of time discussing appropriate indicators of development and wealth, he does critique per capita income, a common indicator.

"PROUT suggests that increases in per capita income are not a sufficiently reliable and scientific index to determine the standard and progress of a particular socio-economic unit. Rather, this approach is misleading and deceitful, because it refers to a simple mathematical calculation of total national income divided by total population. This does not give the correct picture of the standard of living of the people of a particular socio-economic unit, as the wealth disparity in society is concealed. Per capita income shows the mean and not the variation of income distribution. If

inflation is also considered, the reliability of per capita income is further reduced.

On the other hand, purchasing capacity is the real index of how a person's economic needs can be met by their income. All PROUT's plans and programmes in the socio-economic sphere should be aimed at increasing the purchasing capacity of the people. PROUT stresses increasing purchasing capacity of the people. PROUT stresses increasing purchasing capacity and not per capita income. Per capita income is not a proper indication of the increase in the standard of living of the people because people may have very high incomes but they still may not be able to purchase the necessities of life. On the other hand if the per capita income is low but people have great purchasing capacity they are much better off. So purchasing capacity and not per capita income is the true measure of economic prosperity. Everyone's requirements should be within their pecuniary periphery or purchasing capacity."

Conclusion

This booklet has attempted to present Sarkar's view on economic thinking. Sarkar, as this booklet hopefully has illustrated, is attempting to transform and expand the present economic discourse through his four fold division of economics. In addition, Sarkar is critical of both capitalism and communism, not only due to the adverse economic outcomes that result from these systems, but because of their impact on the spiritual ideals and perspectives of individuals. Sarkar does, however, have an alternative. His theory, PROUT, attempts to create a new civilizational discourse, one that has as its central themes spiritual development, ecological balance, self-reliance, and the use of technologies in a cooperative context. Finally, his sense of humankind's economic future is not dismal; rather, it is bright. Once basic necessities are guaranteed and once resources are better distributed and used, then the massive population of the world will be an incredible asset. To paraphrase Sarkar, on that day, "the New Humanity will wake up to a new day in the New World.

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