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LAW OF KARMA IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract: *Having understudied the law of Karma in the age of technology we discovered the benefits technologies have ushered in their wake and religions inclusive. Likewise we have seen the adverse effects technology has caused human society. By and large, we observe that the most poignant problem of modern life has not only lost its significance but also what is best in humaneness. Similarly, it is observed that this contemporary period is characterised by the humiliating contrast between the spectacular scientific and technological attainments on the one hand, and a shameful degradation of the human person, morality and spirituality on the other hand.*

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning, people believed that spiritual powers influence every object, decision and being and operate in ways that control their behaviours. In the developing countries of Africa, Asia and others, there existed traditional and customary ways of explaining natural phenomena and environment. These phenomena have awakened in us the realization that there is more to things than we can perceive in them with our senses. Also, this phenomenon is best understood as unending because it presupposes the nature and structure of reality as against mere appearance. Thus, these natural phenomena defy human understanding but they account for the very fact that every fortune, misfortune, suffering, pleasure, good behaviour and misdeed in human society is unarguably traceable to them. Thus, one of these phenomena is the law of Karma.

In another development, it is cheering to note that 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed unprecedented break-through or changes as well as transformations in technologies. Today, global world has created a gamut of technological developments and engagements that this technological revolution has thus reduced the world to one "global village". In spite of the numerous advantages occasioned by technologies in these centuries, the world has also witnessed wars that are more gruesome and tragic than recorded before in human history. These adversely are the corresponding effects of the technological handiwork of this age. It is against this background that we shall take a critical look at the place of the Law of Karma in the technological age with a view to looking at the effects of these technological advancements to humans and their environment.

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THE LAW OF KARMA: AN OVERVIEW

Karma is a concept common in Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism, specifically based on the Vedas and early Upanishads, which explains deed, action, cause and effect that is inherent in existence within the bounds of time, space and change. In a simple language, Karma means an action, or combination of actions, inexorable law of justice, law of nemesis and causality. Broadly speaking, Law of Karma is the belief in moral order¹.

This doctrine of Karma holds that every action and consequence by a small being or group of beings produces effects. These effects, which could be good, bad, or neutral, determine the future of the being that performed the action. Karmic actions, therefore, are the heart of the multi-life theory, just as physical and chemical actions are the basic causes of the multi-forms of water².

Karma is the physical manifestation of the law of balance and harmony, as it applies to the results of decisions reached and attitudes held by beings capable of free will and choice. Karma, which has been traced back to the early Upanishads, around 1500 BCE is not fate; humans are believed to act with freewill, thereby creating their own destinies. According to the Vedas, if an individual sows goodness he or she is bound to reap goodness; if one sows evil, he or she will reap evil. Karma refers therefore to the totality of humankind's actions and their corresponding reactions in present and past lives, all of which determine the future. However, much Karma does not have an immediate effect; some accumulate and return expectedly in an individual's later lives. The conquest of Karma is believed to lie in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction³.

Hugh Chisholm asserts that every act of every individual has not only a moral value producing merit or demerit, but also an inherent power which works out its fitting reward or punishment⁴. To the Hindu, this does not make heaven or hell unnecessary. Though, these two exist in many forms more or less grotesque, the soul passes to one of them after death and there receives its due. However, that existence too is marked by desire and action, and is therefore productive of good and evil, and the soul is thus still entangled in the meshes of Karma it must again assume an earthly garb and continue the strife. No wonder, Karma and Samsara (Round of births) are immutably inseparable. Also important is, if the good suffer evil they are expiating for the evil in their previous existence. Likewise the wicked that enjoy prosperity are still enjoying the fruit of accumulated earlier good deeds⁵. Life therefore is a process without beginning and end. Hinduism recognizes existence as cyclical. Salvation here becomes practical since Hinduism recognizes deliverance from the power of Karma, and each of the philosophic systems has its own method of obtaining it.

Karma, in its major conception, is the physical, mental and supramental system of neutral rebound that is deeply rooted in the very being that one experiences. Karma, for these reasons, naturally is tied to reincarnation since actions and deeds

in previous existence will affect one's current situation. Thus, humanity and individuals alike experience good fortune and tragedies for their action. Apparently, the concept of an immanent "God" figure is unnecessary with the idea of Karma. "it is vital to note that Karma is not an instrument of a god, or a single God, but it is rather physical and spiritual physics of being⁶. As the law of motion governs the inanimate objects, likewise the law of Karma governs the motion and happenings of life, animate and inanimate, conscious and unconscious in the cosmic realm.

The consciousness of Karma is embedded in the psyche of the ancient Indian, for whom Hinduism originated as a result of a pressure of a practical need due to the process of evil in life⁷. Thus, evil is moral and physical. Suffice it to say that the individual is a product of many lives in the past, the condition of mind being ignorant as the result of the former minds, which were inherited by the individual from his former self. This seems to make liberation from this circle necessary and perhaps, difficult. It is thus clear that these evils as presented in the Hindu scripture are Samsara – round of rebirths, Karma – action and deeds, Kama – desires, Ahamkara – egoism Avidya – ignorance. This is the connection among these evils whereby one begets the other or one results as a consequence of the other⁸.

In Bhagavad-Gita, rebirth is a consequence of our Karma, our actions from our desires; our desires originated from egoism, egoism obtains as a result of ignorance of the true essence of reality⁹. In fact, it is due to ignorance (Avidya) that man fails to realize that the world is an illusion Maya in the opinion of Shankara, or Lila – game of god as held among the Vishnuites¹⁰. This is the hallmark of karma.

Since the time of the Upanishads, it was established that the man is thrown into the ocean of phenomenal world of time, change, space and causation, which fluctuates between creation and dissolution. Man is equally fettered to the disguising phenomenon of Samsara. He is unable to get out of this Samsara until he attains to the Absolute- the Release (Moskha) ¹¹. Human beings are said to be spurred into actions by the desire of their fruits. This is well spelt out in the Mahabharata.

The tree of desire in the heart is born of men. Confusion; ignorance is its root; wrath and Pride are its trunks; its vigour of growth comes from acts done in past lives¹².

From a philosophical point of view, Karma is a moral agent or moral banking system that allocates a credit and debit of good and bad. In order to attain supreme consciousness; to escape from the wheel of life, death and rebirth and the knot of Karma, one must altogether transcend Karma. This method of transcendence is differently dealt with in many streams of Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism as well as other faiths and philosophical systems. Interestingly, the angle from which salvation is sought is the positive aspect of the law of Karma. This is manifested in humankind showing the state of liberation, which means to be with "Brahman", and Brahman is pure being, consciousness, bliss, and the man who has attained salvation (Moskha) can see the eternal in the temporal, and temporal as grounded in the eternal and participating in it¹³.

LAW OF KARMA IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL AGE

It is most fascinating to take a critical look at the Law of Karma in the age of technology following the trend in the aspect of the law of cause-effect. In the era of the advance of science and technology, we need a moral foundation for development, otherwise, there is a danger looming in the horizon that our purported development will turn out to be our destruction. Thomas Hobbes conception that the life of humankind is short, cruel, and brutish bears a fact to the reality of dynamism that is seen in the ambit of cause and effect. Thus, the awareness of the finitude of man makes him develop anti-thesis where he has to face his precarious consequence overtime¹⁴. Of a truth, the concept of Karma in the age of technology is an existential dynamic reality within the confines of an individual, community and nation.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the advance of science and technology is making the distinction between natural and moral evils more pronounced. It is not in doubt anymore that man has a role to play in some of the events greeted by scientific development. The ruthless and quick exploitation of the natural resources of the world by the human beings of the industrial countries has been shown to be mainly responsible for the ugly state of degeneracy in our planet¹⁵. In addition, some of these natural retardations practically find expression in desertification, genetic engineering, scientific research, psychosomatics, injustice, unbridled abortion and others; these we shall visit shortly. Meanwhile, these have launched a devastating blow against this dynamism and advancement.

Heidegger posits that "one-dimensional interpretation of the modern world with its reign of technology is only a grotesque and distorted picture of our world"¹⁶. This implies that the modern-day technology is not genuinely premised on a moral inference, rather it destroys the essence of man as a constructing and cultivating being, and in which case, man on earth cannot be saved from the dangers posed by the upsurge of scientific techniques. The fact remains that man, then, is the architect of his own fortune and misfortune because his intelligent action results in dispassionate reaction. This is the law of Karma that is inherent in existence within the bounds of time, space, and change. Man on the other hand, is thrown into the transitory phenomenal world of time, change, space and causation which fluctuate between creation and dissolution. This, accounts for the relationship or interplay between the law of Karma and the age of technology of which man is at the centre of them all. To this end, it is most heinously dehumanising and penchantly appalling that at this level of our scientific development, natural disasters and moral evils keep coming and multiplying in human kingdom. Not only that, there are also humanitarian crimes against humanity in any of its forms and against generations: the present generation against the future ones. This is the law of cause and effect. Meanwhile, before a critical appraisal can be made, it would be plausible to explore the good aspects of technological advancements.

The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed phenomenal and rapid changes as have not been known in the concise period of time in history. Today, global world has created so many technological advancements and engagements that this technological revolution has thus reduced the world to one "global village," "and all the inhabitants – white and black, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu – now belong to one great world house"¹⁷. It is interesting to note that these inventions and engagements have indeed built safeguards to shield the vulnerable against interminable reversals of fortunes as the world undergoes a rapid change. In essence, technology has brought in its wake so much good. Suffice it to say that with the invention of the automobiles, the mass transit systems, the jumbo-jets and the space ships, the human beings of today can rightly claim to be the most mobile homo-sapiens that ever existed¹⁸.

In addition, the advancement in communication has made the exchange of goods and services easier. By way of satellite communication, it is absolutely possible to arrange a debate "between the Russian Politburo and the United States congress, moderated by a Lagos-based journalist, and watched by some billion people in several countries simultaneously"¹⁹.

Indeed, spectacular feats have also been achieved in the aspect of agriculture. A handful of sophisticated machines have been invented for proper use in irrigating arid lands, and in cultivating and harvesting of crops. It is now possible for people to successfully cultivate hundreds of hectares of land. Not only those, people of today also have amazing and fascinating technical know-how in the area of vitamins, proteins and the general chemistry of food. Consequently, the inhabitants of certain areas of the globe have made abundant nutritious food and clothes easily accessible and affordable²⁰.

The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed unquantifiable breakthroughs in technological medicine, resulting in the near total conquest of many of the lethal diseases, which humiliated past generations of humanity. This general development in preventive care and hygiene has drastically reduced infant mortality and affected an appreciable increase in the life expectancy of people, such that today, the world is experiencing an unprecedented increase in the population of the human species²¹.

Perhaps the latest and by far the most intriguing in the history of technological achievements is computer. In this, "Brave New World" has finally struck the machine that can travel at the speed of light. The super computer is said to be capable of performing two billion calculations per second, and this speed can be further increased almost to infinity. The digital library programme makes it possible for any person knowledgeable to trace any book or article in a computerized library within a minute²².

Additionally, great achievements have been recorded in the area of reproductive technology and genetic engineering. This has expression in *In Vitro* fertilization, Artificial insemination, surrogate motherhood, embryonic Transfer, human cloning.

Supported by this is the increasing knowledge of the *DNA* and the chromosomes that make up each cell of human body by the eugenicists. To this end, due credit must be given to the people of the western axis through whom the globe has got this most glamorous of human civilization. For without the possibilities offered by modern technology, life would be impossible for many. Thus, the weak could become extremely vulnerable; hence they would be unequipped to tackle the otherwise hostile and unproductive nature²³.

It is pertinent to note that global technology in its wake is not indifferent to religion from the sense of the world. The development of technology has tremendously affected religion globally. Esposito and Watson rightly assert that religions are also global and spatially rooted; but in particular they have non-economic values and norms to sustain; and their interrelations are thus of considerable importance for global order in the sense of sustaining the values of justice, humanness, peace and ecological integrity²⁴. Worthy of note is the fact that human and environmental developments are the goals of technological development. Similarly, the building of humanity in the era of civilization shares the global ethics of people should treat others, as they would themselves wish to be treated. In modernity, civil society is certainly the space in which religion can breathe more easily and through which it can best subscribe to the development of different order²⁵.

AN APPRAISAL

Despite the numerous advantages occasioned by technologies in the 20th and 21st centuries, the world has also witnessed incessant, "bloodiest" and gruesome wars in human history. With the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, humanity woke up to a frightening possibility in the extinction of the human race, and the obliteration of all life on earth, to be brought about by the product of our intelligence and the work of our hands. But rather than abate our appetite for war, the 1945 experiences seem to have fuelled the craze for the accumulation of atomic, bacteriological and chemical weapons of mass destruction. The development and maintenance of which has not only poisoned the natural environment, but also robbed humanity of enormous human and financial resources, which could otherwise have been used to fight the ghosts of poverty, ignorance and disease, which still hold most of humanity captive²⁶. In fact, as the genius of our most intelligent citizens find expression in ammunition industry, warfare has become the most highly developed activity of humankind such that "trouble is just a few mouse clicks away"²⁷.

Development in criminality has been consistent with the advancements made in the instruments of destructions. The practice of suicide and homicide has lost its horror. In most of the advanced countries in the world, abortion is not a crime. It is rather a right, a civil right that is solidly protected by the constitution. There

is a debilitating dimension made today in reproductive technology and genetic engineering in the society that seek to remove the "mystique" surrounding human generation, but in so doing, the dignity, value and uniqueness of the human person is relegated to the background²⁸.

No less offensive to human dignity is the amount of pornographic and sleazy materials traded on television, telephone, radio and newspapers and in fine arts. These materials thus magnify sensuality and promiscuity, berate fatherhood and motherhood, encourage all kinds of experimentation in sexual conduct, and render absurd the traditional ideas of chastity and virginity. The result is the emergence of a hedonistic culture, which not only commercialises the human body, but also normalises some otherwise disgraceful sexual perversions²⁹.

Reflecting on these and other paradoxes in technologies, which the Western hemisphere has given in the wake of civilization, it is obvious that these technologies refuse vehemently to build safeguards for the vulnerable and these are bereft of human values and the essence of human person. Sequel to the above is the law of cause and effect, which is couched in the Law of Karma. However, we need to emphasize here that despite the fact that these technologies are good on their own they are misused by human beings to the effect that others suffer misfortune, mishap and even annihilation. The deliberate misuse of technology immediately brings about the principle of the law of karma, cause and effect. It is the human conduct or behaviour that determines the misuse of technology and this is what concerns karma. Thus, self-contained existence within the matrix of the human community shares a nourishment of and a compliment to the philosophic culture of human endeavours. This has expression in the positive rather than the negative aspect of life. Man is self-creating, self-transcending and self-acting being. To this end, man's creation and self-transcendence should be occasioned for the good of the individuals in the society. This will promote the course of humankind on earth. In the same vein, this technological misuse coupled with purely empirical beings, with techniques and patterns of manipulation will ultimately bring about man's ruin. At first, man fashions or fabricates technology. He is the designer and advocate of technology. As a result of his power of manipulation, and fabrication, man forces things which he does not really need into being in order that he can conquer and dominate his environment. However, his syllogic logic of total domination, of fabrication and technocratic reduction of everything to object of investigation and mere raw materials backfires on man himself who has become architect of his own misfortune or a victim of technological discovery.

This tendency towards total dimension, uniformity and one-dimensionality is not a peculiarity of any one particular nation or culture. Hence, the reign of technology has a global relevance. It is however thought that technology is based on the mobilization of the world through the Gestalt of the worker. Holistic domination has entered a stage which is even more threatening than what has gone before.

Hinduism and other religions strongly believe that human composite entails the material and the immaterial. Human body is a combination of spirit and matter. The Law of Karma manifests itself in the material as the immaterial sprouted and incubated it. However, the two are inseparably tied together. To this end, human life is simply meant for development spiritually and materially. It must, however, be emphasized that Hinduism places more on spirituality than the material. To the Hindu, the two must be developed concurrently. It must be argued that genuine spiritual knowledge according to the Hindus does not depend solely on technology; rather it rests on Vedic knowledge. All materialistic knowledge is Maya-illusion to the Hindus. It is ignorance that makes materialistic knowledge to soar without the attachment of global ethics. Crela Bhaktivinoda writes in one of his songs "Advancement of material knowledge is simply the advancement of maya's jurisdiction. The more you become implicated in material knowledge, the less you can understand spiritual consciousness"³⁰. Writing in 1922, the Indian sage, Abraham Mitrie Rihbany as cited by Ehusani spoke of western technological civilization in these words:

You call your thousand material devices labor-saving machinery, yet you are forever busy, with the multiplying of your machine you grow increasingly fatigued, anxious, nervous, dissatisfied. Your devices are neither time-saving nor soul-saving machinery³¹.

The foregoing reveals that the western technological civilization cannot advance the course of humanity especially in the current human footing. They, however, acknowledge the so many wonderful things brought about by the west, but the spiritual civilization that would have elevated human person to the status of the divine is conspicuously missing. Giovan Picco as cited by Okolo is apposite when he states that

You shall have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which is brutish. But you shall also have the power, out of your souls judgement to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine³².

The co-existence of these two powers of the intangible and the tangible in the human person appear to be verified as evidenced in the unprecedented achievements of science in modern times that have lured the modern person into a fool's paradise, where he or she is unable to recognise his or her nature as a paradox³³. The horrifying truth is that the engagement in the culture of science will land humankind into the darkest region of ignorance because as far as technology is concerned no one is completely in charge.

The Ecopaniads posit that those who are captivated by the external movements of the material energy are worshipping science. In the modern civilization, there are numerous institutions for understanding technology, how a motorcar or an airplane moves. But there is no educational institution for investigating how the spirit or soul is moving and how the spirit soul can undergo rebirth, and being refined and attained absolute; rather they are busy studying the external

movements of matter that are targeted towards the destructions of human beings. In spite of the wonderful mechanical arrangement, a motor vehicle cannot move on its own³⁴.

The present civilization is in a very dangerous position as a result of the fact that there is no arrangement anywhere in the world for genuine spiritual education. In this regard, human society is being pushed to the darkest region of existence. As earlier noted, the real culture of knowledge is the advancement of spiritual knowledge as against the culture of science in the matter of bodily comforts that will follow its natural course. That is, repeated birth and death – Samsara. The cultivation of bodily knowledge is momentary but the spiritual knowledge is absolute and rewarding with Brahman. As a matter of fact, the death of the body was fixed at birth. So you cannot stop the natural course of the terrestrial body – namely birth, old age, disease and death. The (Bhagavad – Gita. 10.84: 13) says that

This body is nothing but a bag containing three primary elements – mucus, bile, and air – and that one accepts this combination of mucus, bile, and air as himself is an ass. Even great philosophers and scientists take themselves to be this combination of mucus, bile, and air. This is the mistake.

Essentially, the philosophers and scientists possess souls, and according to their Karma, they are exhibiting their talent. They do not understand the implications of their behaviour.

The questions that come to mind are why do we find so many, different personalities? Why this difference in humanity? The simple answer is the law of Karma; action and reaction, cause and effect and law of nemesis. One who understands this mystery of life is in knowledge. Human life is designed to understand the mystery of life. And one who fails to utilize this human form positively for the purpose of human and environmental development is a miser. Garga Upanishad; 2:72:16, also supports the above in clear terms.

Similarly, this human body is invaluable. One who uses it for cultivating spiritual knowledge is a brahma – a wise man, and one who cultivates materialistic knowledge is a miser. That is the difference between a wise man and a miser.

It is germane to note that a miser arrogates to his or her body sense gratification. A wise person values the essence and the attachment of his or her soul – atman with the absolute – Brahman. Indeed Bhagavad Gita 8:12:1 says “one should not become a father, a mother, a teacher, or a governmental head unless one is able to elevate one’s dependents to the platform of spiritual knowledge, which can save them from repeated birth and death”. To this end, the total negligence of the spiritual knowledge and the promotion of bodily knowledge have plagued humankind into the various crises, which are symptoms that humanity has not completely become what it has to be, but also that it is on the wrong footing. Paulos Greogries sums up the whole situation when he says, “the Chariot of human development has gained momentum but seems to be running amuck without a charioteer”³⁵.

Be that as it may, the Law of Karma in the age of technology clamours for true humaneness, equilibrium in technology and human and environmental development, in communication and communion; in culture of knowledge and culture of science; spirituality and morality. Ryerson observes rightly that as for our faith in scientific technology, we strive to maintain balance between commitment and openness, firmness and flexibility, continuity and change, memory and receptivity and spirituality and morality³⁶. These observations can build on the commonalities and intelligently discuss the possibility of creating societies of tolerance and swallow both human and technological flaws and thus engage in a global enlightenment on spirituality and morality, an improved means to an unimproved end about the very nature of human civilization.

It is worth-insisting upon to emphasize that what the world is currently experiencing is the product of previous deeds. Thus, the invention and manufacturing of atomic, bacteriological and nuclear weapons were the attendant results of the holocaust in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945; and are the corresponding effects of the incessant warfare in our contemporary times without abatement. The scars these interminable wars have left in the world remain unhealed. Also, abortion that has been legalised causes infertility in women and some terminal diseases. Tersely therefore, human freedom to act the way he or she likes is both his or her grandeur and his or her misery. His or her freedom permits him or her to be the greatest or worst of all human species. Put differently, his or her freedom to act accordingly makes him or her to have higher birth and be united with the absolute and as well released from the wheel of birth and rebirth; so also his or her freedom to act viciously plagues him or her to have a low birth as ghost, animal or stone, coupled with chains of birth, death and rebirth. All these expressions are the product of the law of Karma.

CONCLUSION

Having understudied the law of Karma in the age of technology we discovered the benefits technologies have ushered in their wake and religions inclusive. Likewise we have seen the adverse effects technology has caused human society. By and large, we observe that the most poignant problem of modern life has not only lost its significance but also what is best in humaneness. Similarly, it is observed that this contemporary period is characterised by the humiliating contrast between the spectacular scientific and technological attainments on the one hand, and a shameful degradation of the human person, morality and spirituality on the other hand. Despite its purported grandeur as it claims, technology has many imperfections, is hinged on unethical foundation and among others. It is advocated therefore that technological science in contemporary times should be built on a unique, solid and moral foundation that would usher in a more balance world order in the aspect of technological science, morality, and spirituality³⁷.

As predicted and warned by Heidegger that empirical beings who subject everything into experimentation and investigation, with techniques and patterns of manipulation will ultimately bring about man's ruin. To this end, individual's logic of total domination, of fabrication and technocratic reduction of everything to single objects of investigation boomerangs on individual who becomes the victim of technological misuse.³⁸ Therefore, it is true that technological advancement is a catalyst for global development, and it is good holistically as the handiwork of human fabrication and discovery. It should however be used for the good of humanity instead of misuse that brings about its negative aspect.

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