

Artha Forum @ GEV

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Ancient wisdom, modern business. The word Artha has many meanings and meaning is one of them. The word Artha also means meaning. It also means purpose, motive, money, or basically any form of opulence or economic development. It could mean gain and so on. But generally when the word Artha is used especially in this context that we are using it now, we mean to say economic development. Economic development is undoubtedly a very important aspect of human society. No human society can function without some degree or some type of economic activity. An economic activity is a root of generation of wealth. This is Chanakya's statement in the Artha shastra, the famous Artha shastra, that economic activity is the root of creation of wealth. A society must create wealth. Wealth that is monetary, physical wealth, of course also spiritual wealth which is ultimately the real wealth

But the creation of physical wealth or economic assets or economic prosperity is an important part of our development and it would be a mistake for us to deny its importance or to minimise its role in human society even for those who are speaking or seeking spiritual perfection. So, money, yes, it is very valuable but it is not honey. Because the taste of money is not always sweet. Many a songsters many a poets has sung about how money cannot bring you so many things. Money cannot bring you love, money cannot bring you happiness; money cannot do so many things. But nevertheless, especially as the days go by, money seems to have becoming more and more important, to the extent that people have begun to equate money with happiness. They have begun to equate money with success and even at national level or international level. All you basically hear about, apart from terrorism is economics, economic development. That's all the subject is, that takes place at different forums and within the country's economic development is spoken about, as if, it is that one panacea, that one mantra that can solve all problems. So here we have a lop sided development, where the spiritual side is neglected and only the material side especially economic side is emphasised unduly beyond reasonableness.

Some years ago, a very wealthy man, he was I think one of the top 3-4 wealthiest people in the world, was interviewed on a TV programme in the west and after the whole programme was over, he was asked, "Mr. so and so, thank you for this most wonderful interview. But I have one final question. If god were to appear in front of you" and interviewer she sprung up this question out of the blue, she brought in god somehow out of d blue. Earlier it was all about more mundane things. "If god were to suddenly appear before you, what would you ask him now?" And surprisingly this gentleman did not hesitate and we may think well he didn't hesitate because he was clear in his mind that he wanted to ask for more money or whatever and here this person says that all he wants in life now even if god were to appear before him, is a little happiness, he is not even asking for a lot. He is asking for something very little, because obviously he did not even have even that. So this is a telling lesson. Srila Prabhupada, the founder of our ISKCON movement, he used to give a beautiful analogy. He said that basically, because everything of this world is perishable, it is like a 0. It doesn't have any lasting value. Therefore our wealth is one big 0, our social prestige is one big 0 also. And if

you have one 0 after another, it doesn't need a graduate degree in mathematics to know that the result is still 0. And then one's physical beauty another 0. Three 0s but still 0 and then you add every other material qualification that one could conceive of, all we do is add more and more 0s and total sum total of all that is simply 0. Because it's all ultimately of no value because it is going to get destroyed, sooner or later. But Srila Prabhupada said, you add Krishna, you add god who is like no. 1, to your life and that no. 1 is what is giving value to all the other 0s that may be there. When that 1 no exists and you add the zero of wealth then it becomes 10, it's very valuable. You add all the other 0s one by one, it multiplies 10 fold, u get 100, 1000, 10000, 100000 and you go on increasing the value of what you have in your life. Because you have added the most valuable person or the object and that is god. In other words, Artha or wealth or economic development has some meaningful value, has sustainability, only and if only it is seen in connection with god. Otherwise it is like one of those bubbles that appear, the bubbles of foam that appear in the waves of the ocean, and then burst and disappear when which are gone forever. Many wealthy people have appeared in this world and many have disappeared never to be heard off again. So then what is the value of this economic development in and of itself? So therefore the Vedic culture basically trained people in the art of detachment, detachment for what would inevitably be taken away from us by force by the laws of nature, including our health, our family, our wealth, our very body itself. Eventually all these things are very transitory. They are very temporary. They will be with us for a while and then leave us. So what is it that will stay with us that is the important point. There are some nice proverbs in India, and I will just quote a paraphrase one of them. It talks about different things that we consider very valuable in our life and what happens when one dies. "*Dhan ni bhumo*" that this wealth in the olden days of course there were no safe deposit lockers, banks and so on, so wealthy people would often hide their treasures in the ground, they would dig a whole somewhere and then cover it up and then they knew where the location was but when one dies, one leaves but the wealth is left behind underground for somebody else to enjoy. "*Pashukoshthe*", in the Vedic culture having a lot of cows and doing animal husbandry and grains and so on was also considered wealth. "*Dhanya dhanwan, gavayo dhanwan*", so to have lots of grains, and to have cows is real wealth as we have been seen this morning on the wonderful tour that we had. So when we die the animal i.e. our animal wealth will remain in the cow shed, we will go but the wealth will remain. "*Naari grihadvare*", the wife will remain, will come till the doorstep and she will accompany us till then when the body is taken out. Of course, the same would apply for the male also when the wife dies. So because the ladies generally did not accompany the funeral procession to the cremation ground so they would come up to the doorway of the house and see off the body very tearfully. So the wife can accompany the person only till the doorstep of the house, no further. "*Sakha smashane*", the friends will accompany the person only up to the cremation ground and what about the body. The body will accompany us till it is actually burnt, the body is destroyed. And then we move on, the Bhagavad-Gita teaches us that we move on to our next life, our next destination and everything that is considered valuable has been left behind so what is it that we take with us? What we will take with us is our consciousness and our dharma or lack of it. This is what will determine the state of our existence in the next life. And in this way the cycle of birth and death has been going on from time immemorial. So Artha, when seen in connection with dharma is valuable. Dharma is a very broad term and we will not delve too much in the intricacies of the term here but suffice it to say that dharma is a way of life that is given to us by god to live. A very simple understanding. So when Artha or economic development is pursued with the idea of obedience to the laws of god of falling in line with the plan that the supreme lord has for all of us in this world, then such economic development is valuable and

meaningful. The Vedic culture really trains people from childhood even in the midst of wealth to be renounced. The scriptures give numerous examples of kings who had children and then these children once they grew up to youth, were actually sent to the forest to meditate to perform austerities and penances for some years to prepare them for their life of power and opulence and kingship. It wasn't something that they just easily earned and easily obtained without any effort. And the kings were very cautious about how they would train the next generation, that was the subject that was also discussed yesterday in terms of business but also in terms of who would take over the kingdom and rule. The king was very particular that the next generation should not take this wealth, opulence, power and so on for granted. It should not go to their head. They should not become proud and arrogant, and misuse and mistreat the subjects of the kingdom and exploit them. Rather they should understand that their subjects like children and they should look after their subject as parents look after their children. And now when you have tremendous wealth and power at your disposal, this is actually the test of a person's character. It is said that in adversity, many people will show some character and determination, although it is difficult but many people will do that. But if you truly want to test somebody's character then you must give that person power and wealth, because wealth brings power. And wealth therefore is a root of all corruption because it gives rise to all the other forms of corruption in the mind, the search for power and indeed the exploitative spirit. So this is the test. So the kings of your, they were very careful to ensure that the next generation of rulers would be very level headed and they had their feet on the ground. So they said, yes, you were born in the palace, amidst all kind of opulence, but now, you have to go to the forest, and live on fruits, roots and berries given by the saints, spiritual knowledge. They understood that eventually everything will be taken away from us so the kings would retire at the certain age and handover the kingdom to the successors and go away and live in the forest. And they were able to do that easily because they had been trained in such a manner in their youth. When there is practice then we can do something easily. But if u r not accustomed to doing something then we find it very hard to do it. So when one has not practiced the art of detachment when one is young, it is very difficult to do so when one grows older. And therefore the Vedic culture was so designed that even in the midst of opulence, perhaps we cannot even imagine in this day and age, such opulence the kings had. Even in the midst of such staggering opulence, there was an internal spirit of renunciation, an internal spirit of sublime detachment. And we find the great kings were able to do that like king bharat, king yudhishtir, pandavas, numerous examples like this. So this is a lesson to learn that even though economic development is an important goal of our life and human society needs economic development critically but ultimately it is temporary. So the pursuit of wealth has been encouraged, economic activity has been encouraged especially for certain sections of the society. At the same time, for those very people, as well as for others, it is impeditive also, that the spirit of detachment and renunciation is simultaneously cultivated. This is what actually kept the society in balance. You see, the Vedic culture sustained for millennia and millennia. I was talking to some economists, and they were saying that usually, communism or social doesn't endure. History shows that it endures only for a few decades. And we are seeing that in Russia, china. China is communist only in name but the economy is very capitalistic. So communism doesn't last for very long. Few decades, may be a century. Capitalism may last for a few centuries. But because its foundation is secular, its foundation is neutrality with respect to dharma or god or religion or spirituality that also cannot endure. But a form of economic development that is centred around detachment in the pursuit of god realisation is the one that will sustain and therefore this form of economic development and the social model is actually said to be endless. Not just for a few centuries. Take away the god centeredness and the

spirit of detachment from any economic system or a social system, all you are left with is exploitative spirit that will come up sooner or later. A famous political leader of the 20th century said, that communism is the exact reverse of capitalism. In capitalism, man exploits man and in communism it's a reverse. It's all a question of man exploiting man, or humans exploiting humans, humans exploiting nature, humans exploiting everything else in this creation. But this is not what the word Artha implies in the Vedic context. The word Artha is not simply blind economic development or development for the sake of development, but it is development for the sake of fulfilling certain legitimate needs of the body, mind, fulfilling legitimated needs of the society and to keep the harmony and balance within the society. So it is wrong to say that the Vedas minimise economic development. That is not true. There are numerous references to how the pursuit of wealth has been actually glorified but with the riders. Many times we neglect to see the riders, the qualifying remarks, and the overall purpose of such economic development. So the Vedic model of Artha the ancient wisdom that we are speaking about is essentially a model that speaks about earning money in the pursuit of service. So therefore there was abundant generation of wealth in the Vedic culture. But it didn't stop there. It also meant abundant sharing. Now, we have a model or an ideology which is quite different. If you generate abundantly, wealth and so on, you don't share it abundantly. And we also tend to waste it abundantly. Today, you will be surprised to know, I will give you some basic statistics, which I came across the other day. The amount of food that is wasted in the world of the total amount of food that is produced in the world, do you know how much is wasted? Can you take a guess? 75%, that's a rather pessimistic figure, of course, wasted. Yes. Actually it is about 30%. 30% is actually completely wasted. The food that is produced and the statistics show, this is the statistics released by United Nations, some branch of the United Nations. And they say that the higher the income of people and the countries with higher Per Capita income, the higher the wastage. E.g. in North America and Europe, the total Per Capita annual food that is wasted in kgs is 282-300 kgs per person. That means in North America and Europe, every person on an average wastes 282-300 kgs of perfectly edible food. Of course, much of this food is also wasted in transit in food supply chain, right from the farm all the way up to the ultimate consumer. But in North America and Europe as much as 40% of the food wasted is by the consumers. In other words, consumer has, let's say, he buys something from the market and it is half eaten and he throws rest away, was eating a plate but leaves half the food in the plate that could have been eaten, wasted. We find this in India a lot, especially in weddings and such events. There was a newspaper article the other day about Bangalore and there is a statistics staggering about how much food is wasted in one day in marriages across the city of Bangalore. I don't quite remember the statistics but they were certainly staggering. So it seems to be in the modern days of the world, the higher the income that the people have, the countries have, the higher the degree of wastage. As compared to that, it is said that, Sub Saharan regions, their wastage is much lower. While in America and Europe, per capita the consumers waste about 100 kgs at their end per year, in Sub Saharan Africa and perhaps in Asia as well it is 10 kgs, wastage per year per person. The amount of food produced in sub Saharan Africa per year per capita is less than the amount of food wasted by North America and Europe per year per capita. In other words, what is our modern economic development model doing? We are focussing on increasing production, not always and I will come to that in a moment. We are also increasing consumption. This is called consumerist society, the shopping malls and the razzle dazzle of all the temptations and attractions in this world that the advertising in the streets that entices people to just buy more and more even if they do not need something. One marketing professional was saying that, "our understanding of marketing is that we have to create the need in the mind of the people even when

non exist. So you have to convince people that they need something when they actually don't need it. And then you sell them your product and make money out of it." So the modern economic system is very much consumer oriented, consumption oriented rather, not consumer oriented, consumption oriented. So you increase production, increase consumption, increase wastage and on the other hand you have people who are very poor, or very deprived. And therefore the gap between haves and have nots increases and that gives rise to tensions, envy, revolutions and no solutions. This is a situation today. Also for reasons that have nothing to do with welfare, countries many times urge their farmers to not grow. They send them on vacations to some nice place like Hawaii or somewhere. We will pay you but go there, don't grow anything because if you grow then production will increase and prices will fall. There are also instances when millions of tons of food grain of perfectly good food grain are dumped to the sea just in order to maintain the prices. So the problem of scarcity is a myth. It doesn't exist. It is artificially created by humanity because humanity today doesn't understand that god has made provision for every living being. Srila Prabhupada used to say that the ant and the elephant, both are provided for, by god. That's a fact. We never see that the ant or elephant goes to the university and opens a shop or a business to earn a livelihood but god is looking after them. God is looking after the atheist, the agnostics. So why would he not look after those who are devoted to his cause. Srila Prabhupada used to also mention the situation in early communist china, soon after the communist revolution or 100 years ago, the poor peasants, they were basically quite religious people and the communist party people came up to the villages and tried to destroy their faith in god. And it was a time of hardship because there was a famine. So there was a shortage of food. So they came and told the farmers, that "look, you have been going to your church every day for so many weeks and months, and god has not provided you any food and here we are members of the communist party, you ask us and we will provide you food." So then next day they came back with trucks full of loaves of breads and distributed to the poor peasants. And said that look, your god did not provide you what you wanted, but the communist party has provided. Therefore you should follow communist party. Some of the peasants were poor and were not intelligent, they agreed to the logic. But those who were intelligent understood the fallacy. It was indeed god who provided loaves of bread but he used communist party as a via medium. So an economic model where god is not in the centre, god is not in the picture, can only increase disparities, it can increase on exploitation, increase disaffection, envy and so on among the society. But the Vedic model of Artha ancient wisdom is that even in the pursuit of wealth, one must follow the principle of dharma, one must not be unscrupulous, and one must not be greedy, even if one is ambitious. And one must learn to abundantly share and give. So producing goes side by side with sharing. It doesn't go alone. This is actually a wonderful idea of Vedic system and it's interesting that today, one of the indices of judging economic development is garbage disposal index. Garbage disposal index means how much waste is generated. And there are tons of tons of the waste. More the waste is generated, the more the economy is considered as sophisticated and developed. But here we have seen an example of 0 wastes. Everything is recycled. The harmonious society that can then perpetuate, that can sustain. So the Artha that we are speaking about based on ancient wisdom can indeed be applied in modern business situations if these principles are also used. We have seen in the last two days, many examples of entrepreneurs, professionals who are duty bound by their status in life to not engage in economic activity. There is a certain class of people, the renunciants e.g., who are prohibited from performing economic activity for themselves. So those who are responsible for generating economic activity, they support the other statuses of life. And this is how the Vedic system was so harmonious it is not a spirit or a question of any "ism". Actually, the Vedic

economic model combines certain points of capitalism and certain points of socialism, certain points of communism. It is a very holistic, integrated, economic, social, spiritual, philosophical model. It is a wonderful model that enables everyone to prosper materially and also more important spiritually. While today's civilisation, and today's economic wisdom says that we must increase the wants of the people, the vedic wisdom says, even in the pursuit of wealth, consume less, decrease your wants and transcend them rather than increase your wants. This is a model that is a need of the hour in the modern day. Yesterday we were speaking about the feverish pace at which the economic development is going on. And it is only this sublime wisdom that can be like a healing balm to the feverish pace at which the so called economic development that is taking place in the world today. So the pursuit of spiritual success is at the core of such social model, where economic development is not seen as end into itself but as a means, as a supportive means to help society gradually progress towards spiritual perfection. In Sanskrit the word is called "Purushartha", here the word artha implies aims or goals. And the Vedic scriptures talk about dharma, artha, kaam, moksha. Dharma implies religiosity, Artha implies economic development, kaam indicates enjoying worldly pleasures and moksha involves liberation. Of course there is a fifth objective called Bhakti but we will not go into that. We will club the 4th and 5th together and call it spiritual perfection. So ultimately, ordinary religiosity, economic development is meant to help us to go beyond even striving for worldly pleasures and coming to the point of striving for spiritual perfection. So this is the context in which we have to see, not just economic development but also the pursuit of enjoying worldly pleasures. All of these have a role to play in our life. But if we keep spiritual perfection in the primacy, at the pinnacle, as the most important thing that we need to achieve in our life and then organise and arrange economic development in accordance with that ultimate objective then this economic development will be very wholesome, harmonious, holistic and a happy economic model. Thank you very much. Hare Krishna.

Question:

You talked about 0s, adding 0s, adding one before d 0s, if we are in business or an activity which is 0 which is may be increasing people's wants, lot of sudden technology business, and what we are doing is actually may be in somewhere increasing wants and utilising resources which we shouldn't be, and does adding 1 justify and solve and does it make us that we are not responsible, how should I understand that?

Answer:

I will just rephrase your question. What I understood is "We are participating in a modern eco system, and by our participation we are also doing what the system is doing, we are encouraging people to increase their wants so on and so forth and because we have added that 1 in front of all of our 0s, is it justified?"

Not everybody can come and live in GEV not everybody today can do what is done here by devotees; although if that were possible, that would be nice but we know that it is not possible. So for those who are not able to live this kind of a life, and there is a big movement in the world now, called back to the land movement. It's happening all over the world in every country, where people are so tired of this modern, commercial, industrial, technological civilisation. They just want to lead a simple life, grow their own food and live of the land and be happy. So if you can't and most people can't do that in a drastic way like this, what you can do is to simplify your life where you are at this point in time.

At least at an individual level, we may try not to increase our wants. Before we acquire anything we need to ask, do I really need this extra washing machine, do I really need extra this and that, do I really need to do that? Can't I just reuse this, or can't I just carry on using what I was using earlier? We go on questioning ourselves. Let's begin at home. Maharaja was quoting Gandhi to say "be the change you want to see". So yes, let's simplify our own existence and do that as much as we can. So then at least whatever defects there are in our participating in the system outside can at least somewhat be compensated. Because, we don't have so many choices. The third point is that, yes, you have to survive and in the course of survival, that is what the eco system is, well, you may have to participate in that, but you have already minimised it by the first two points, now you add Krishna, you add god to life. And whatever defects may come in, well, because you have surrendered the fruits to Krishna, surrendered your very activity to the lord. The lord takes care of that. Everything we use now is a product of violence. I dare say, many things, including things that have come in this microphone, there are also some elements here that are products of violence, a product of cruelty to animals, or something is there in everything that we may use. Look around you, the things of daily use, you can't run away, your computer terminal, your computer set, laptop; there is always some defect there. But we are part of the world, we are trying to use technology, trying to use modern economic model to make people aware of something higher. So yes, there is no complete solution to the problem on a practical level. But we can try to simplify our lives and try to spiritualise our lives by adding that 1. And then go on with our lives and participate in spreading this message to everybody so that whatever we have done in our lives, other may also join in. And in this way, it will become a growing movement. Eventually that will spread. So that is what probably the best thing to do. Hare Krishna.