

Curative strategies to invert problems for economic growth

Review by Ar. Prof. Dr. SS Bhatti



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Food, clothing and shelter are the three globally recognised basic necessities without which human life cannot survive on planet earth. Together they constitute an indispensable wherewithal sustained by the discipline of Economics. A plethora of literature exists on this, including highfalutin writings by the so-called experts and specialists. Be that as it may, Economics, in my view and understanding, should be ethical consumption/conservation that operates the bounties of Nature and optimises her resources in material exploitation on the basis of an intellectual construct for society's survival vis-à-vis its ever-changing problems and their exigent solutions. This is reason enough to pay heed to the following exhortation because India is expected to become the third largest construction market globally by 2022. Economic development is a critical component that drives economic growth in economy, creating high wage jobs and facilitating an improved quality of life. An economy is an area of the production, distribution and trade, as well as consumption of goods and services by different agents.

Because of the diversity, and complexity (or even perplexity) of the problem, we need global thinking such as the American genius Buckminster Fuller pioneered, developed and demonstrated by practical application of pragmatic ideas in world perspective. The operative principle of his approach is 'Synergy' that he defined as "the behaviour of whole systems unpredicted by the behaviour or integral characteristics of any parts of the system when the parts are considered only separately." *The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.*

An ever-increasing investment is made in the Construction and Infrastructure sector where there is an emergent need to apply such thinking. For example, Fuller designed the geodesic dome—the only kind of building that can be set on the ground as a complete structure, and one with no limiting dimensions. The strength of the frame actually increases in ratio to its size, enclosing the largest volume of space with the least area of surface. This was his virtuoso invention, and he said it illustrated his strategy of "starting with wholes" rather than the parts. The noteworthy point is that a mere intellectual handling of the problem

such as professional economists tend to do would never yield the expected results, because they are pitifully ignorant of the whys and wherefores of the Construction Industry.

This crucial, if unfamiliar, factor is best explained by the discomfiting fact that though America has produced the largest number of Nobel laureates in Economics, none has so far been able to show how 'inflation' that haunts the discipline worldwide could be controlled. I once raised this question in the annual budget meeting of the Panjab University Senate as its Fellow. When nobody could answer it, I told the celebrity university dons that the solution eludes the best of economists because the problem does not lie in the discipline of Economics. It is created by 'greed', whose study and solution belong to the discipline of Ethics that deals with the questions of 'Right and Wrong', 'Moral and Immoral'.

It should be clear from this brief exposition that the holistic approach that the understanding and eventual solution of the problems of Economics warrants cannot be expected of politicians, bureaucrats, or mere economists. It entails an integrated expertise to intelligently coordinate the planning, design and development of a model that encompasses concerns for everything—including the Built [i.e. Human] Environment. Such qualification belongs only to an Architect, because he is taught and trained to look at 'wholes' rather than 'parts' to solve the problem holistically and with a far sight bordering on poetic vision. For this curious reason, I have been promoting what might strike some experts as an outlandish idea for the past many years: *The next revolution in the world would be in Architecture, and not in any other discipline.*

The gargantuan task as sketched above has been handled to an appreciable extent by Goonmeet Singh Chauhan, who is an architect and futurist with a passion for transforming people's lives. He presents a new methodology that he calls 'Invertonomics'—inverting problems and looking at them as economic opportunities. His book *Invertonomics* identifies eight persistent problem areas—namely, Honk-Free India, Cleaner Air, Traffic, Safer Cities, Garbage, Toilets, Equity, and Office of Bharat. It proposes well-resolved and, in some cases, successfully implemented models for tackling them. His book is a compendium of



Book INVERTONOMICS – 8 Ideas to Transform India

Author Goonmeet Singh Chauhan

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Foreword Navin B Chawla, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India

"innovative yet pragmatic ideas that will have a direct impact on our lives and help us realise the dream of an advanced India."

Chauhan has identified eight key problems, as noted before, and offered practical ways for solving them. For example, a simple Re 1 fine could generate Rs 60,000 crore annually and reduce 'honking' by using an ecosystem-based model that could cause a shift in individual behaviour from self-gain to 'collective good'. As a recurrent device, he suggests a 'Smart Citizen Card' designed to surmount the mammoth scale of the stated problems. It is a GPS-enabled SIM (Smart Citizen Card) installed in all vehicles that would monitor the frequency of honks and transmit the information to receiving towers managed by operators, who would then prepare and deliver Honk Bills to the defaulters.

The problem of vehicle-based air pollution is similarly *inverted* into an economic opportunity, which while reducing non-compliance to under 10%, would generate Rs 20,000 crore annually. The Smart Citizen Card aided by the Kinetic coordinates' surveillance technology could fine incumbents for violating traffic rules, resulting in disciplined citizens and making our cities walkable again.

Goonmeet has suggested an Index for Women's Empowerment & Safety [IWES] in order to create a benchmark for design, construction and operation of 'Safer Cities'. The system for handling the mammoth problem of garbage entails an empty wrapper, envelope or cardboard box that is made to look like a unit of currency. This would be used by a rag-picker as a contracted agent of a Smart Waste Corporation [SWC]—a public sector undertaking or public-private partnership enterprise. It would collect and sort out garbage sent by garbage collectors, separate recyclable and non-recyclable materials, sell the former to recycling plants, and send the latter to landfills or sell to waste-to-energy plants as fuel.

The public toilet-cum-coffee shop is introduced as an urban renewal agent in marketplaces across Indian cities, so as to become gravitational points around which all change can happen as a visible symbol of rejuvenation. If the government decides to accept and implement the author's idea, India could get 14,00,000 clean, safe and hygienic toilets—all new, all for free—by 2025.

The design of the book is charming. It gently persuades you to read the contents for a refreshing encounter with offbeat ideas. The written word is illustrated and supported by apt and strategically placed images and diagrams. Those who are impatient with lengthy text can take recourse in this material for a quicker grasp of *Invertonomics*. Chauhan has done well to rebut prospective arguments against the concept of the book and



Ar. Goonmeet Singh Chauhan

the innovative (if somewhat unsettling for routine reading) ideas that the book contains.

In my considered opinion, all kinds of India-loving decision-makers who are concerned with the establishment of a stable and progressive economy, should pay due attention to the author's painstakingly developed "8 Ideas to transform India", and see how these could be implemented in the pursuit of making India a world leader in *atmanirbharta*. His ideas, ideals, and pragmatic solutions of recurrent tricky problems are in the truest spirit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's farsighted initiatives in many areas of planning, design and development for making India an enviable modern nation.

In conclusion, let me stress that Ar. Goonmeet Chauhan's ideas are definitely innovative as well as pragmatic. However, these thoughts are in the nature of curative strategies, which will without doubt yield the conceptualised results as economy-building gains—with the major bonus being that Indians would collectively learn the basic lessons in social ethics (hitherto missing in our wayward lifestyle) for becoming responsible citizens. But the long-term advantages would accrue only from the full-fledged adoption of Buckminster Fuller's visionary pragmatism rooted in *preventive* strategies—embodying ideas, designs and inventions for everything, including inexpensive shelter and transportation. This alone could achieve what I call 'Holistic Humanism', by virtue of which India would assuredly become the future superpower of our collective dreams.

Decades ago Fuller had sown the seeds of what I have envisaged to be the 'Revolution in Architecture', to which Ar. Goonmeet Chauhan contributes substantial material adapted to the Indian milieu. I would call the instrument of this welcome drastic change *ARCHONOMICS*. ✚

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