

Reification of Economy and Society, Climate Change and Covid-19: SDGs as Adaptation

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Abstract : The only matter that distinguished human beings from other animals and placed them on the state of supremacy over others is their labour power which is unlimited and by which they produce their means of subsistence or material life as food, shelter and clothing and make social world or super organic society from animal world or inorganic society. But, for reification or prioritizing economic activities and profit maximization over human beings, in capitalistic society human labour power is used excessively to fulfill the appetite of unlimited economic interest of bourgeoisie and human beings are acting as the prime agent of ecological destruction that leads to different climatic changes which cause increasing frequency of various natural and manmade disasters that affect their lives and livelihoods in an unwanted fashion. Novel corona virus or Covid-19 is the latest version of such manmade disaster which has already become epidemic in almost all countries of the world. Using their labour power human beings have already explored some vaccines or medicines to curve the reign of its destructive invasion but medicine or vaccine is not the ultimate solution to it as this pandemic is the dress rehearsal of upcoming more destructive collapse of civilization within decade if the reification, the root cause of all existing and upcoming epidemics, is not addressed properly and sincerely just now. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must be the strategy of adaptation to it and only human natural and unlimited labour power can help the world to achieve SDGs. Only then, the survivability of human beings on earth in safe and sound may be ensured.

Keywords: Reification, Economy, Society, Climate Change, Covid-19, SDGs, Adaptation

1. Introduction

Human being is the best creature and the cause behind its supremacy over all other animals is its possession of labour power, the power of creativity, the power of

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producing the means of subsistence or the power of creating utility to meet their basic needs¹. It is the prime one among all distinguished characteristics that differentiate human beings from all other animals. It is very important to note here that, the labour power that human beings are given is unlimited. On the one hand, based on this labour power, human beings made society and civilization². They have already developed a world of information and technology. They are on the verge of fourth industrial revolution (4IR) where, it is dreamt that, artificial intelligence, (AI), created by them, will be used in every sphere of economic and social life³. On the other hand, this labour power has become the prime and foremost cause of the destruction of their society and civilization. For the maximization of profit, in the early and mid 19th century economic activities are so prioritized that human labour power is used and abused excessively⁴. The culture of massive production and consumption is being cultivated in the mind and thought of human beings by bourgeoisie through different mechanisms as media, literature, movies, newspapers, GOs and NGOs⁵. Abusing the human labour power human beings developed so called capitalistic mode of production and they are working as the prime agent of global warming and climate change by emitting Green House Gases (GHGs) and deforestation⁶. WMO, NASA and NOAA affirmed that 2019 was the second warmest year ever. The average temperature for 2019 was only a small fraction of a degree lower than in the warmest year 2016, a year with a strong El Nino, when changes in the ocean and air in the equatorial Pacific Ocean led to shifting weather patterns worldwide and pumped a lot of heat from the Pacific into the atmosphere⁷. As time passes, this trend of global warming and climate change has reached a rather alarming stage due to reification of economy and society that means economy is all, human beings or societies are only for economy, economy is not for human beings⁸. Now our beloved world encounters climate change induced various natural disasters as increased frequency of droughts, floods, river and coastal erosion, cyclones and tidal surge, the thunder storm, water logging, arsenic contamination, salinity intrusion, tornadoes, cold waves, earthquakes, landslides, hailstorm etc⁹. Ongoing globally destructive pandemic novel corona virus or Covid-19 is the latest natural disaster caused by climate change and it is the latest not the last because it is a dress rehearsal of upcoming more destructive collapse of civilization within decades¹⁰. So, to ensure the survivability of human beings in this world what has no alternative till now, human beings have to save it by conservation of nature achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As climate change is a man-made disaster

caused by abusing unlimited labour power of human beings, the solution must be man-made and it also lies only in true and versatile use of unlimited labour power of humans where society must be prioritized over economy and environment friendly mode of production must be developed and practiced¹¹. Only right use of human labour power can save our beloved and only world ensuring a humanitarian society free from all forms of discrimination.

2. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to explore interrelationship among reification of economy and society, climate change, Covid-19 and SDGs. Other specific objectives were to find out how abuse of human labour power in capitalistic mode of production plays role in climate change and natural disasters like Covid-19 and to examine how true use of human labour can ensure achieving SDGs or adaptation to climate change.

3. Methodology of the Study

The study was qualitative. Data from secondary sources as relevant books of different authors specially Karl Marx, journal articles, different relevant websites specially websites of Who and UNFCCC/IPCC and different research organizations, worldometers, author's own estimates/projections and newspapers were used in this study. Personal observation of societal behavior and qualitative information were collected from various sources. Google scholar was searched for original articles on capitalism, climate change impacts and adaptation, Covid-19 and SDGs. The study was performed from June, 2020 to September, 2022 to collect data related to capitalism, human labour power, global warming, climate change induced natural disasters, Covid-19, adaptation to climate change and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some quantitative data were used in the study to supplement the qualitative.

4. Analysis

4.1 Human Labour Power and Mode of Production

In this globe, no animals except human beings produce their means of subsistence¹². These animals extract their subsistence directly from nature and human beings could follow the same process at ancient society's primary stage that is identified as the commencement of 'savagery', 'hunting and gathering society' and 'simple society' stratified by L. H. Morgan (1877), Lenski (1966), and Herbert Spencer (1860/2020)

respectively. For the absence of (creative) mode of production, distinguishes human beings from other animal, many sociologists addressed the human beings of this stage as members of animal world or inorganic and Organic society, not the members of social world or super organic society or civilized society; they did not reach the state of supremacy over other animals^{13,14,15}. Only the matter that distinguished human beings from other animals is their labour power, a capacity to add use value to commodities. To Marx, human labour power is unlimited and by which human beings produce their means of subsistence or create utility. Others do not have this labour/production power or creativity, they have only labour that does not create any mode of production¹⁶.

4.2 Society and Human Speaking and Labour Power

To survive in this world, human beings need not only food and shelter like other animals; they also need cloth unlike other animals. This need of clothing also played vital role to differentiate them from other animals and placed them on the state of supremacy over others¹⁷. Besides, only human beings have speaking or interaction power where their face or body languages are important and based on this interaction with one another and their labour power, human beings make society and economic categories stem from human labour are produced by human beings. Other animals do not have speaking power. That is why they cannot make society, they have no economic activities and they are not social beings^{18,19}.

4.3 Ecosystem, Modes of Production and Social Change

Unlike other animals to survive in this globe human beings must produce the means or commodities that fulfill their fundamental needs of food, shelter and clothing. By producing their means of subsistence they basically produce their material life²⁰. But, to fulfill these needs, what they produce and how they produce depends on where they live and what they find in climate, nature, environment or ecosystem²¹. By the change of their means and force of production, their relations of production change which results in the change of mode of production or social change. According to Marx, by the course of time and following the rules of dialectical materialism, human beings passed different modes of production or societies successively as primitive communism, slave, feudalistic and capitalistic modes of production or societies²².

4.4 Labour Power, Capitalism and Commodity Fetishism

Commodities produced by the labour power of human beings have only use value: the ability of a commodity to render a particular service to an individual, to fill only one particular need or function and to serve directly as a means of existence. ‘Not one atom’ of exchange value lies in the commodity but lies in the social framework of capitalistic society and here this exchange value dominates over use so highly that people are made to believe that value is a substance inherent in commodities and there is an extraordinary power in commodities to ascertain its value (False belief) which is termed as ‘fetishism of commodities’. Commodities of human beings conceal the social nature of their private labours and thus the relations between individuals appear as relations between material objects²³.

4.5 Reification of Economy and Society, Abuse of Labour Power and Climate Change

Commodities in capitalistic mode of production appear to have a life (personified) of their own and one commodity enters into social relations with another, as such appear to have human qualities. While human beings create society based on their labour power and other distinguished characteristics, reification in society of capitalism reverses this system by making it appear as if society or economic system makes human beings²⁴. For profit maximization economic activities in the early and mid 19th century are so prioritized that human labour power is used and abused excessively and it is hypothesized in the First Earth Summit in 1992 that human beings through their labour power activities are acting as the prime agent of rapidly destroying the ecosystem or equilibrium of the Earth and leading to different climatic changes, “a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods”²⁵.

As time passes, this trend has reached a rather alarming stage as the accelerating pace of human labour power, both industrial and agricultural has caused, among other things, an increasing accumulation of polyatomic molecules which cause global warming and increasing frequency of various natural disasters that affect their lives and livelihoods in an unwanted fashion as well²⁶. The 2010s were the hottest decade on record on the planet. Since the 1960s, each decade has been warmer than the previous one by significant amounts. While the 2010s continued this trend, the second half of

the decade was especially warmer. Deke Arndt, chief of the monitoring branch of the National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) of the USA said that human beings have entered a new neighborhood in the last five years. Cavin A. Schmidt, director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies argued that these trends are the footprints of abuse of human labour power stomping on the atmosphere. Islam Zahidul and Shafie, Hasan (2017) explored that as the reification of economy and society or climate change the world encounters increased frequency of various natural and man-made disasters as droughts, floods, river and coastal erosion, cyclones and tidal surge, the thunder storm, water logging, arsenic contamination, salinity intrusion, tornadoes, cold waves, earthquakes, landslides, hailstorm etc²⁷.

4.6 Climate Change and Covid-19

Novel corona virus or Covid-19 is the latest version of manmade disaster and which, according to WHO, has already become epidemic in almost all countries of the world irrespective of developed, undeveloped or underdeveloped. Jem Bendell (2020), a social science professor of the University of Cumbria and well-known among environmentalists for his “Theory of Deep Adaptation” found climate mayhem lurking behind covid-19 outbreak. To Bendell, the first effects of climate change are disastrous factors of the wildfires in Australia and California, African hurricanes, South Asian typhoons and harvest collapses in the Middle East that can disrupt wildlife migration to human societies and the second effects of climate change are the consequent pandemics of diseases like coronavirus²⁸. His thought is supported by Arron Bernstein of Harvard University’s T. H. Chan School of Public Health as Bernstein said, though there is no direct evidence relating global warming with Covid-19, wildlife is moving to cooler areas. So, human beings become in closer contact with them and the diseases they carry as epidemiologists found the coronavirus originated in bats. The same speech is echoed in the tongue of Thomas Gillespie, a renowned ecologist and associate professor of environmental sciences department of Emory University as he (2020) argued, “Pathogens do not respect species boundaries. I am not at all surprised about the coronavirus outbreak. The majority of pathogens are still to be discovered. We are at the very tip of the iceberg. Human beings are creating the condition for the pandemic of the diseases by reducing the natural barriers between host animals – in which the virus is naturally circulating – and themselves”. Gillespie explains that, wildlife everywhere is being put under a lot of stress. Major landscape changes by

reification of economy and society as logging, mining, road building, massive urbanization and industrialization are causing animals to lose their habitats. As a result, species become crowded together and come into closer contact with humans. Endangered species are now moving and mixing with various animals as well as human beings²⁹. Disease ecologists argue that viruses, bacterias and other pathogens are also likely to transmit from animals to humans in the various informal markets like “wet market” in Wuhan which is thought by Chinese government to be the starting point of the current Covid-19. These informal markets have sprung up to provide fresh meat to fast-growing urban populations around the world. Here animals are slaughtered, cut up and sold on the spot³⁰.

4.7 Exponential Growth of Climate Change and Corona Virus

Howard Kunreuther and Paul Slovic (2020) showed that, the curve of coronavirus pandemic sadly grows exponentially – at an increasing rate over time- like the global climate change curve. Carbon emissions, their concentration in the atmosphere and their consequent effects are growing exponentially right now³¹. Almost 34 months passed since the first corona infected person was detected in Wuhan, China. According to worldometers statistics of November 16, 2021, within this time more than 5.11 million people have already died, more than 254 million people infected by Covid-19 in the world³².

Human beings had been trying relentlessly heart and soul using their labour power to invent vaccines or medicines to curve the reign of the invasion of novel corona. They have already explored some vaccines. Live Science (2021) reports that as the world races to vaccinate people as fast as possible the coronavirus is mutating, picking up genetic changes. According to Indian Times, Indian National Task Force for Covid-19 (2021) informed that the genetic diagnostic laboratories in India have detected over 24,000 mutations in 7,000 variants of the novel coronavirus in the last one year³³. So, the untamed and redoubtable impact of Covid-19 on lives and livelihoods of human beings is going on.

4.8 Covid-19 and Its Socio-cultural Impacts

Jem Bendell (2020) explained that the lockdown, social distancing and using face mask caused by the coronavirus pandemic all over the world are providing human beings with a taste of the disruptions to their direct social interactions with one another

in daily life and creating imbalances in human social relations and social structures or society. It causes not only massive death tolls but also short, mid and long term socio-economic, political and cultural impacts all over the world, which have already reported by different research institutions. This crisis reveals how fragile our current way of life has become³⁴.

4.9 Covid-19 as a Dress Rehearsal of Human Civilization Collapse

However, medicine or vaccine is not the ultimate solution to it as Steven Desmyter, co-head of responsible investment at Man Group, explains the reason behind it in this way, with global warming, there will be catastrophes of equal or bigger magnitude than Covid-19. Saijel Kishan (2020) in his article published in Bloomberg.com emphasized that, policy makers and business leaders have to recognize that climate change will cause even more destructive and disruptive disasters than the coronavirus³⁵. Financial companies could face a ‘climate Minsky moment’ or a sudden collapse of values, if they didn’t address climate change. Economists at JP Morgan Chase & Co. warned that the most risks of climate change including the collapse of human civilization can’t be ruled out. Consulting firm McKinsey & Co. viewed that, intensifying climate vulnerability could put millions of lives and trillions of dollars at risk. Jem Bendell (2020) addressed this pandemic as dress rehearsal of upcoming more destructive collapse of civilization within decade for making economy and society pivotal over human beings to fulfill the appetite of unlimited economic interest of bourgeoisie³⁶.

4.10 Solution within Human Labour Power and Achieving SDGs as Adaptation

So, human beings have to address the root cause of all such types of epidemics – existing and upcoming, being sincere to preserve the nature by reducing the emissions of Green House Gases (GHGs), ensuring zero population growth and preserving the bio-diversity which was addressed before four decades in Brundtland Report of 1978 titled ‘Our Common Future’ and other successive sustainable development related summits, policies, protocols, programs and action plans. Here the crying need is changes in behavior and/or belief in response to improve the conditions of existence, including a culturally meaningful life³⁷. It is theorized that adaptation in human being has a greater number of attendant features for adaptive ability including very complex human cognition, social organization, values and meaning³⁸. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations General

Assembly in 2015 which are aimed to be achieved by 2030, must be the strategy of adaptation to climate change induced calamities that endangered human survivability in this world. Each goal's targets measured with indicators should be executed seriously and sincerely so that the basic needs of the present generations can be met without compromising with the meet of basic needs of future generations giving the equal importance on economic, social and ecological aspects of sustainable development. Specially, the SDGs number 1, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 as No Poverty, Quality Education, Decent Work and Economic Growth; Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reducing Inequality, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and production and Climate Action respectively should be given the priority in execution³⁹. In this aspect, it is high time to use human natural and unlimited labour power in inventing various adaptive technologies to climate change, which will play vital role in achieving SDGs, conserving nature from pollution and ensuring the survivability of human beings on earth in safe and sound.

5. Conclusion

It is expected that, the Covid-19 will shake the conscience of the people of all countries and institutions especially most developed countries (MDCs) or G7 countries including BRICS who are liable for around 90% GHG emissions or global warming by prioritizing the economic interest over the existence of human beings and have been ignoring the matter of climate change and showing insincerity to the concept of sustainability in their development plans and policies. Now, they are expected to take the matter of climate change seriously and sincerely stopping the reification of economy and society, admitting the supremacy of human beings and their labour power over all types of economic interests at least for the security of their own lives and wealth. To maximize profit, the trend of massive production and massive consumption abusing the unlimited human labour power, the distinguishing characteristics of human beings from all other animals, must be given up by bourgeoisie. In this context, all steps to produce weapons of mass destruction (WMD) which cause great damage to human-made and natural structures especially the biosphere should be stopped just now because it must be kept in mind that it is not possible to fight against air or invisible enemies as coronavirus or something like that waiting to dismiss human civilization in near future.

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