Preface

The genesis of this thesis was incidental. My initial thoughts had a remote relevance with altruism and management. Initially, the idea of establishing a functional relationship between consumption pattern and social contribution at an individual level had been haunting me from quite a long time back. Such ideas grew in view of the fact that the liberalization of our economy had virtually opened the flood gate of unbridled consumerism, mostly driven by ‘greed rather than need’. I was under the impression that such greed-led consumerism not only posed a serious threat to the environment but also had lead to an unprecedented degradation of ethical standards and moral values across all cross sections of people in our society. The future of our society in terms of environmental and social degradation, therefore, appears to be in a highly vulnerable condition. Unless a sustainable lifestyle and reduction of consumption could be ensured, it would be difficult to restrain the ‘gene’ of consumerism and diminishing moral values in our society. But barring the idea, I really didn’t have any clue as to how to go about it, so that the concept may culminate into a serious research work.

During this period of uncertainty, I suddenly got hold of a philosopher’s stone which drew my attention towards and interest into altruism. I got access to the title, “The Economics of Altruism”, a compendium of 33 invaluable essays written by prominent economists and edited by Prof. Stefano Zamagni, University of Bologna, Italy. The compendium was published by the International Library of Critical Writings in Economics in the year 1995. After this my research work apparently got some desired direction and momentum. I started searching available literatures on altruism, covering diverse inter-disciplinary areas like social psychology, economics, management etc. Realising that the study on altruism is still in its nascent stage and in the Indian context, not much work has been done on this topic, I thought I must work on this subject seriously. The idea has been to throw some fresh light on such basic human traits which have hardly got their due attention so far. Altruism is a plausible and universally accepted human behavioural pattern, yet it is neglected by the classical economic and management theories. The materialistic world appears totally indifferent to these basic patterns. Why is it so? Does altruism really make any difference in the taking of economic and managerial decisions? Does the altruistic character of an individual influence his/her decision-making process? These queries haunted and prompted me to initiate such a research work, with an expectation of arriving at some reasonable answers, theoretically and empirically.
Classical economists and management professionals, in particular, ignored altruistic behavioural patterns of individuals for quite a long time. This is, perhaps, due to the perception that the concept of altruism is antithetical to the classical concept of economic rationality. However, perceptions are being changed gradually. Now-a-days, even management scholars have started recognizing altruism as a plausible behavioural pattern, having significant influence in the management and decision-making process.

I would consider my works amply rewarded if it could generate some interest among the future breed of young researchers to move forward with much wider scales of coverage, so as to bring more light on the altruistic behavioural patterns of individuals, hitherto inadequately explored.

Proper knowledge and understanding on altruism, I believe, would help policy makers design strategies which would contribute to the inclusive growth of the society.

July 2016