

BUDDHISM: THE CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIO-ECONOMY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

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Abstract

This paper has the aim to explain the contribution of Buddhism for socio-economy sustainable development. Sustainable development has been a matter of discussion in development practices and theories for a long time. Since the industrial revolution, development has mainly focused on economic progress in consumption, production, and industrial growth together with technological advancement. Every society has a particular world view that reflects their people's values, especially their values concerning how their socio-economy should function. The world view of western societies has typically reflected a considerable extent the principles and concepts of mainstream of socio-economy. In recent years, an alternative to mainstream of Buddha' teaching for socio-economy sustainable development has been increasingly discussed. In light of the very difficult problems that we are facing in the world, adopting the values and perspectives of Buddhist principles can be expected to do much more to overcome large scale of socio-economic dysfunctions and improve societal well-being than can be expected from utilizing the world views of industrial capitalist economy.

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Introduction

Sustainable development has been a matter of discussion in development practices and theories for a long time. Since the industrial revolution, development has mainly focused on economic progress in consumption, production, and industrial growth together with technological advancement. Human and social development as well as the environment has not much received careful consideration, and all three have deteriorated. As human beings have experienced social, environmental, economic, political and psychological problems from development driven mainly by economic growth, there have been increased discussions on development directions and new prototype for development. Among major milestones in the sustainable development movement, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972, may be considered as the start of global concern towards the international environment (Payutto, 2006: 56-60).

Sustainable development is the development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within two key concepts: the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given, and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs." Bruntland Report endorsed these observations and sought to give a new direction to the process of development. The prominence given to 'needs' of the present as well as the future in Bruntland Report reflects a concern to eradicate poverty and meet basic needs of the

vast humanity. The concept of sustainable development focused attention on finding strategies to promote economic and social development without causing environmental degradation, over-exploitation or pollution. The emphasis on development was particularly welcomed by the developing countries and the groups who were primarily concerned about poverty and social deprivation (Mukesh kumar Verma, 2019).

Development may be identified as a process in which a system or institution is transformed into stronger, more organized, more efficient and more effective form and proves to be more satisfying in term of human wants and aspirations. J.H. Mittelman (1988) has tried to defined development as the increasing capacity to make rational use of natural and human resources for social end, whereas under-development denotes ‘the blockage which forestalls a rational transformation of the social structure’. Other important definitions of development also tend to convey this idea in more or less elaborate form. Thus, (Paul Baran, 1957) described development as ‘a far-reaching transformation of society’s economic, social and political structure, of the dominant organization of production, distribution and consumption’. He pointed out that it has never been a smooth, harmonious process unfolding placidly over time and space. In short, people wish to make best use of their natural and human resources in order to achieve their social end. The process which fructifies their effort in this direction is called ‘development’; the factor which fructifies their effort is called ‘underdevelopment’. Since the concept of development was specifically addressed to the ‘developing countries’ or ‘developing nations. It would be essential to understand the status of this set of countries.

Sustainable development concepts were further discussed in the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 when Agenda 21– a program of action for sustainable

development worldwide was adopted. As a major result of the Earth Summit, the Earth Charter listed guiding principles of sustainable development. It contains a broad array of economics, social, political, and environmental / ecological policies and acknowledges the interdependence between these elements in addressing the peoples' wellbeing. Both approaches are consistent with the importance satisfying present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, they differ in "how" this sustainable development mandate can be achieved (Mukesh kumar Verma, 2019: 376-377).

According to the teachings of Buddhism, human beings are born in a state of ignorance. Ignorance is a lack of knowledge, and it is this lack of knowledge that causes problems in life". This is because people without knowledge or wisdom simply follow their desires or cravings for sense pleasures. When people act in a blind craving manner, they are unable to perceive what is of true benefit. However, "when ignorance is replaced with wisdom, it is possible [for people] to distinguish between what is of true benefit and what is not". Wise actions occur when people's efforts and actions are founded on intelligent reflection. If not, people's actions will too often be based on self-interested feelings and ignorant reactions. When people acquire knowledge and wisdom during their lives, they can become more skillful and improve their relationships with people and the things around them. Then they are much more inclined to act out of a desire for the well-being of others (Payutto, 1998). Buddhism deals with the spiritual realm. It concerns wisdom about how best to live one's life in light of the realities of human existence. To understand the essence of Buddhism, it is important to start with the most basic teachings of the Buddha, i.e., the Four Noble Truths. The first of these truths is the existence of suffering. Suffering includes birth, old age, sickness, and death as well as anger, jealousy, worry, anxiety, despair,

dissatisfaction, and discontent. The second truth is the cause of suffering. Suffering occurs because of ignorance of important life truths that cause people to cling, crave, otherwise become attached to external worldly phenomena in the erroneous belief that their possession will bring sustained, consummate happiness or satisfaction (Nhat Hanh, 1991: 147; Daniels, 2010: 957). The third truth is that there is a way out of suffering. We can free ourselves from attachment and clinging by making transformative life changes (Magnuson, 2017: 31). To make such changes requires us to gain understanding of important life truths, gaining the wisdom that not only enables us to cease suffering but to realize the rise of peace and joy. To overcome suffering, people may need training and changes in their mental attitudes. Old harmful habits of thought and action need to be dissolved. The fourth truth is that there is a path (along with particular practices) that leads to the cessation of suffering. This path is known as the Noble Eightfold Path. “The Eightfold Path details the multifaceted nature of changes in understanding, mental processes, patterns and thoughts, and actions and behavior that are required for progress towards reducing suffering” At the heart of this path is living mindfully.

Mindfulness involves the kind of concentration and understanding about oneself and others that helps us live compassionately and with peace and joy. The teaching of Lord Buddha on leading life along the middle path is therefore a teaching on making a choice in life. The Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta presents the Noble Eightfold path which is described as the Noble Truth of the practice leading to the cessation of suffering. The practice of the middle path consists of eight deeds of righteousness. The following eight factors 1) Right View, 2) Right Thought, 3) Right Speech, 4) Right Action, 5) Right Livelihood, 6) Right Effort, 7) Right Mindfulness, and 8) Right Concentration. In the Culavedalla Sutta Bhikkhuni Dhamadinna explained to Visakha, that the

Noble Eightfold Path is included in the threefold training- namely, morality (sila) concentration (samadhi) and wisdom (pañña). Buddhist lifestyle aims to improve these three synergistic abilities to perfection by ongoing practice, which is a development process. Nevertheless, in this case development is just a by-product of Buddhist practice, not a direct aim which must be attained. The development process is an inner spiritual advancement, which is emerging by ongoing practice, and leads to liberation (Mukesh kumar Verma, 2019).

There are at least three important areas in which Buddhist teachings could contribute to a sustainable socio-economy. Moral discipline is the first. In this area, the market economy seems to be quite indifferent as long as our activities are legally permissible. Despite Adam Smith's elaborated discussions on virtues in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the market seems to put more focus on self-interest and the invisible hand in *The Wealth of Nations*.

Milton Friedman suggested that social responsibility for a business corporation in a free market is to pursue profitability within the rules of the game (Friedman 2002: 133). Ayn Rand (1964) opposed the conventional notion of morality because the call for the greater and social goods seems to consistently sacrifice the best interests of the individual. Objectivist ethics hold that "the actor must always be the beneficiary of his action and that man must act for his own rational self-interest". Nowadays, these views are being misinterpreted in the market economy as a sanction for amoral, irrational, and self-centered behavior. Morality is core to the Buddhist worldview and is evaluated by its skillfulness (Pali: kusalā). To serve our best self-interest, Buddhist economics advocate a life based on moral discipline. When our mind and body are not deluded, we can achieve sustainable happiness and freedom.

The second important contribution from Buddhism is the teaching of selflessness (Pali: Anattā). While the market economy focuses on self as the operating entity, the Buddhist teaching on dependent arising (Pali: Paticcasamuppāda) posits that there is no real self-entity independent of other conditions. Our happiness and well-being are inseparable from those of our past, present, and future generations, our natural environment, and rest of the ecosystem. We cannot survive and operate in a vacuum. With this Buddhist perspective, we should abandon the silo mentality and see others' problems as our problems, embrace their challenges as our challenges. It is a transformation from self-centeredness to selflessness. In a sharing economy, we need to share good fortune and bad fortune. Without this sense of commonality, American political philosopher Michael Sandel argued that the very fundamental value of democracy supporting the market economy would be shaken (Sandel, 1998: 119).

The third Buddhist contribution is that changes at the individual and societal level are inseparable. Bhikkhu Bodhi argued: "Two dimensions of our lives [i.e. the internal and the external, the personal and the social] are inseparably intertwined and mutually conditioning, so that our values reflect social and economic realities, while social and economic realities are shaped by our values [at the individual level]. Thus, while it is in our personal lives that we have the most power to instigate direct change, any alternations in our personal lifestyles must also reach outwards and exercise an impact on our interpersonal relations, our social order, our political agenda, and our relationship to the natural environment" (Bodhi, 2000:11).

Buddhist Contribution to Socio-Economy Sustainable Development

Buddhism can be seen to have relevance to the commonly defined dimensions of sustainability in socio-economy. The four noble truths and the

noble eightfold path connect well with sustainability. The first and the second of noble truth explain about causes of suffering and unsustainability whereas the third and the last of the four noble truth explain about the effect or the way of achieving sustainability. The explanation of suffering and causes of suffering enable one to realized that unsustainability is cause through excessive greed or carving. An over reliance on economic growth mentality can be endanger large scale production and exploitation of natural resources including non-renewable resources and the creation of economy and social problems. This highlight an economic growth pursued without paying attention to planetary limits. The cessation of suffering identifies that unsustainability could be overcome by addressed its cause which is not overly relying on an economic growth mentality and being concerned about planetary limits. A change towards investment in good and services with a minimum impact on nature, in term of more careful use of resources and the creation of less waste would make for an economic system aligned with sustainability. The path of cessation of suffering which is the noble eightfold path defines the way toward sustainability.

The noble eightfold path accentuates the value of moderation. To moderate and make full use of any resources drawn from the Earth is strongly emphasized as the remedy for exploitation of natural resources (Danniel, 2011: 35). Right livelihood is the core aspect of the noble eightfold path that is pervasively used in showing the connection of achieving sustainability. According to Johnsen and Gopalakrishan (2006) right livelihood means a life that conform to be five precepts that related to the morality and ethics. Danniel (2007: 35) explained that right livelihood as wellbeing that emphasizes earning one's living in the ways that do not harm, deprive or exploit other people, animals and nature. The right view and the right conduct provided a sense of responsibility to one's self and towards socio-economy in enjoying

the liberty of prosperity and happiness. Muyzeberge (2011) noted that Buddhism encourages the creation of wealth as long as it is done honestly without harming the people besides making positive contribution to society. Wealth creation should encourage selflessness and cooperation rather than capitalist value of self-interest and competition (Paterson, 2006:114).

Another key attribute that explicates the connection between Buddhism and sustainability is the value of interconnectedness of all living beings. This means that both human and non-human being, including nature, cannot exist in their own right, but they coexist (Jame, 2004). Thus, the values of interconnectedness provides an holistic view of sustainability across socio-economic dimensions (Lamberton, 2005:53-68). The Buddhist principles pervasively adopted in making this connection with sustainability with law of Karma. It explains that mutual interaction between causes and effects that help understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. For example, nature is threatened due to ignorance of the interconnectedness of human and nature. If the human realized that the importance of saving nature for their existence, they would not destroy it. Thus, anything that has impact on the self, also has an impact on society and nature (Prayukvong & Ress, 2010:75-91). The law of Karma enables individuals to infer their responsibility to find the balance between self-interest and the society that they live in. in such an understanding tends to foster cooperation instead of competition as a more rationale behaviors in society. The function of economy associated with production, consumption, and exchange that perceived to depend on social nature. The law of Karma accentuates this interconnectivity among different sphere enabling a cyclical view as opposed to a more linear one.

Buddhist socio-economy relates to the idea embedded in Buddhist philosophy that underscores the interdependent nature of all phenomena including individuals, society, and environment of the present, past and future

(Abeydeera, 2016: 44-70). This understanding brings ethics and morality to the fore in socio-economic activity through the awareness of consequence emphasized by the law of Karma that are causes and effects. Wellbeing is also stressed in Buddhist socio-economic supposed to be driven by ethical motivation that seek to cause no harm to individual, to create no agitation in society, and to have a beginning impact on socio-economy. The value of interconnectedness is stressed in initiatives to preserve the environment. For example, the ignorance of interconnectedness of all beings cause degradation. The symbolic relationship between human and non-human including flora and fauna is misunderstood (Paterson, 2006). Buddhist principle of compassion adds the value of empathy to the notion of sustainability. Gaining the capacity to be considerate of others and of their feelings allows one to respect each other. Compassion application in organization context enables better understanding of connections with stakeholders strengthening collaboration and harmony (Prayukvong and Rees, 2010:75-91). Compassion also underlines the value of nonviolence. Paterson (2006: 144-160) claims that biodiversity conservation efforts set forth towards ensuring sustainability are driven by the need for nonviolent coexistence between human and non-human.

Conclusion

Buddhism inspires interconnectedness among all beings, moderation, and empathy in relation to sustainability at socio-economical level. Such relation made in light of Buddhism and value is different to the competitive ethos of economic rationality. Mukesh kumar Verma (2019) mentioned that Buddhism has the potential to link sustainable development at all levels – individual, national and global. A beginning can be made from anywhere. It also provides the reasons why doing so will not only make a world better but also a man happier. Natural resources are finite. The environment gives us all the

basic services free of charge, without which our species cannot survive. Therefore, we should think for sustainable development. It is our fundamental duty to preserve it so that we can hand over our generation a green and clean earth. Our duty to request everyone that come forward to save this planet earth and to develop the society and mankind in a sustainable way.

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