

BUDDHIST APPROACH TO RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF WEALTH FOR A PEACEFUL AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

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One of the major threats to peace and sustainability in the contemporary society is irresponsible production and undue consumption of wealth. Righteous wealth is welcome and poverty is not accepted in Buddhism. Collecting abundant wealth earned through unrighteous means is rejected. Good utility of wealth earned through right livelihood and straightforward effort and its responsible consumption is highly encouraged. Balance and moderate consumption of wealth earned through right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*) is encouraged. Absence of adequate wealth known as poverty is a suffering in the world for a person (householder) who enjoys sensuality (AN. 6.45 (3). WPB. p.914.). According to the Kuṭadanta Sutta (DN. 5, WPB. p. 135.), Cakkavattisihanāda moral decline occurs because of poverty and vices and crimes take place destroying peaceful existence in the society. This is a pathetic reality even in modern context. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to expose a Buddhist approach to responsible production (earning) and consumption of wealth for a peaceful and sustainable society.

Kuṭadanta and Cakkavattisihanāda Suttas reveal that social peace and equality are harmed due to moral decline committed through vices provoked by poverty (DN. 26, WPB. p. 403 ff.)

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Overcoming of poverty should not be understood as the increase of wealth, more desires and wants which are to be satisfied by more consumables and luxuries. In this context, the significant difference between one's needs and wants should be recognized. Needs – four requisites (food, clothes, shelter and medicine) should be fulfilled and wants should be limited and reduced as they are insatiable and boundless and the continuous satisfaction of wants or desires will bring intense and destructive sufferings, miseries, etc. to individual, family, society, environment and the world.

According to Buddhism, poverty involves suffering which causes destruction of equality and peace in the society. As a philosophy of living which advocates the elimination of suffering, Buddhism does not appreciate poverty. As the *Iṇa Sutta* (AN. 6.45 (3), WPB. p.914) reveals, poverty is suffering in the world for a householder. Getting into debt is suffering in the world for a poor person who partakes of sensuality. The decline of moral qualities propelled by poverty is suffering to the entire society. Buddhism values detachment towards material goods and commends contented life (*santussako*), few duties (*appkicco*) light or simple living (*sallahukavutti*), easy to support (*subhara*) as mentioned in the *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta*, (Sn. 1.8) fewness of wishes, having less wants or fewness of desires (*appicchatā*) (AN. 114 (8), WPB. p. 987) as a virtue and balanced living (*samajīvatā*) (AN. 8.54 (4), WPB. p. 1194). Poverty is the non-possession of the basic material requirements for leading a decent life free from hunger, malnutrition, disease, bad health, loss of shelter, absence of other preliminary facilities for standard living, etc. Buddhism recognizes the significance of the fulfillment of the minimum material needs for a decent living even in the context of the aspirants of its higher spiritual goal. For instance, the four requisites for one who has renounced the worldly life are (i) food sufficient to alleviate hunger and maintain good health, (ii) clothing to protect the body and to be socially decent, (iii) shelter for protection from rain, winds, etc. and for the undisturbed engagement with mind development and (iv) medicine sufficient to maintain health care, cure and prevent illnesses. As the *Andha Sutta* mentions, some persons are like the completely blind (*andho*) since they do not have the vision to improve their material wealth not yet acquired and increase wealth already acquired and also do

not have the vision to lead morally raised life knowing wholesome and unwholesome qualities, blameworthy and blameless qualities, inferior and superior qualities and dark and bright qualities. Some are like the one-eyed (*ekacakkhu*) since they have the vision to improve their wealth not yet acquired and increase wealth already acquired but they do not see the necessity to lead a morally raised life knowing wholesome and unwholesome qualities, blameworthy and blameless qualities, inferior and superior qualities and dark and bright qualities. Those who are two-eyed (*dvicakkhu*) are likened to have the vision to improve both (AN. 3.29 WPB. p. 224.). Only the increase or improvement of material conditions is not encouraged in Buddhism and a causal relationship exists between material poverty and ethical or social deterioration as the Cakkavattisihanāda Suttas exposes. Thus, poverty, from this point of view does not involve the absence of an abundance of goods that stimulates the insatiable greed of man.

1. GREATEST WEALTH

According to the teaching of the Buddha, the greatest wealth is contentment (*santuṭṭhiparamaṃ dhanam*) (Dhp. Ch.15. V.204. p.177). The Ānāya Sutta (AN. 4.62 (2). WPB. p. 452 – 453.) introduces the four kinds of bliss that can be attained by a householder in the proper season and on the proper occasions such as the bliss of having wealth, the bliss of making use of wealth, the bliss of debtlessness and the bliss of blamelessness. Thus, the wealth earned righteously is admired and poverty is not at all encouraged in the four types of bliss. Even the survival of the Buddhist Dispensation and contribution to spiritual life is dependent on good support from the people. Therefore, poverty, according to Buddhist teachings, is the absence of material necessities that obstruct a decent living endowed with light living (*sallavukavutti*) and balanced living (*samajīvatā*) through right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*).

2. ECONOMIC ORDER OF SOCIETY

Economic order of society is essential for restoration of a sustainable society. Material scarcity is seen as a key source of conflict that harms equality and peace. According to the Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta (DN. 26, WPB. p. 395 ff.) and the Kūṭadanta Sutta (DN. 5.

WPB. p. 133 ff.), the roots of conflicts lie not only in individual consciousness but also exist in the very structure of society that encourages those roots to grow. These Suttas point out that when the economic order of society is of inequality, injustice and vicious economic disparities; a substantial section of the community is reduced to poverty and people rebel against such social order and as a result peaceful existence in the society is harmed. According to the Kūṭadanta Sutta, the failure on the part of the ruler to look after the essential needs of the people drive the people who are deprived of their needs to resort to crime and rebellion against the governance (state). The imposition of penalties to deal with such a situation does not produce the desired results. According to the Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta (DN. 26, WPB. p.395 ff.), any social order that does not address the problem of economic poverty creates conditions for social unrest resulting eventually in the total decline of the moral standards of society causing a lot of social issues, and the end result of it could be disastrous riots or wars. This Sutta points out how successive “wheel turning monarchs” prevented social problems by following the sage maxim “whosoever in your kingdom is poor, wealth should be given.” Ultimately there came a king who disregarded this advice and let poverty continue (DN. 26, WPB p.398.). This illustrates that, though the ruler provides rightful shelter, protection and defense, he fails to give money to the poor and provide a means of right living which creates wealth for the poor. Then, in that society, poverty increases creating a violent context. A poor man intentionally takes from others what has not been given. When the man is brought to the ruler, the ruler gives the man money because he has stolen since he cannot make a living. The ruler hopes that the man will set up a business and lead a stable life without resorting to crime (DN. 26. WPB. p.399.). But this did not happen. Hearing that the ruler (state) gives money to thieves, more and more people resorted to stealing in order to get assistance from the ruler. When the ruler hears that some steal because he gives money to thieves, he revises his policy and begins punishing thieves with death. However, to avoid being reported to the ruler, thieves begin to carry swords, kill people whose property they steal and launched murderous assaults on villages, towns and cities and indulged in highway robbery and violent murder. Once

they got accustomed to this kind of violence resulting in killing, deliberate lying, evil speech, adultery, incest, covetousness and hatred, false opinions, lack of respect for parents, clan elders and the religious causing deterioration in all social norms.

3. CAUSAL RELATIONS BETWEEN WEALTH AND MORALLY SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

The Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta elucidates this factor in causal origination thus. When wealth is not given to the poor or unequally distributed, poverty comes into being; because poverty increases, theft occurs; because theft increases, weaponry increases; because weaponry increases, murder occurs; because murder increases, the beings' vitality decreases, etc. when violent conditions lead to decrease in life span: When people live for ten years, the ten courses of moral conduct will completely disappear and the ten courses of evil will prevail exceedingly. The idea of 'good' (*kusala*) will not exist. Men will not recognize women as 'mother,' 'mother's sister,' teacher's wife, etc. (DN. 26, WPB. p. 401.) Thus, the world will become thoroughly promiscuous (immoral) like goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, dogs and jackals. Among them, fierce enmity will prevail one for another, fierce hatred, fierce anger and thoughts of killing, mother against child and child against mother, father against child and child against father, brother against brother, brother against sister, just as the hunter feels hatred for the beast he stalks. There will be a seven-day period of war, when people will see each other as animals; sharp swords will appear in their hands and they will murder each other, each thinking 'This is an animal' (DN. 26, WPB. p. 402.). When economic deprivation is eradicated, peace, equality, happiness and coexistence are established and this leads to restore a peaceful sustainable society. According to the above event mentioned in the Sutta, wealth and resources to support trade, agriculture and other occupations should be distributed and proper salaries should be paid to those engaged in occupations adequate to lead good life and this will eradicate material disparities and vices caused by them and bring about social equality, peace and happiness which are qualities for a sustainable society.

4. ETHICAL INFLUENCE ON CONSUMPTION AND PROTECTION OF WEALTH

According to Buddhist teachings, the causes of loss of wealth can basically be cited in the Kuṭadanta Sutta, Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta, Najirati Sutta, Vyagghapajja Sutta, Siṅgālovāda Sutta, Parābhava Sutta, etc. As revealed in the Vyagghapajja Sutta, the wealth amassed has four sources of destruction – immoral conduct (i) Debauchery, (ii) Drunkenness, (iii) Gambling and (iv) Friendship, companionship and intimacy with evil-doers (AN. 8.54 (4). WPB. p. 1195.). Among the twelve causes of unsuccessful man exposed in the Parābhava Sutta, certain immoral causes that conduce to decline, loss and destruction of wealth can be taken. For instance, (1) averseness to Dhamma, (2) preference to wicked persons and averseness to virtuous persons, (3) fondness of sleep, fondness of company, being indolent, lazy and irritable, (4) ungrateful to old parents, (5) deception a brahman or ascetic or any other mendicant by falsehood, (6) enjoyment of luxuries alone, (7) being proud of birth, of wealth or clan, and despising of one's own kinsmen, (8) being a rake, a drunkard, a gambler and squandering all one earns, (9) Not being contented with one's own wife and being with harlots and the wives of others, (10) Being past one's youth, taking a young wife and to be unable to sleep for jealousy of her, (11) placing in authority a woman addicted to drinking and squandering or a man of a like behavior, (12) being of noble birth, with vast ambition and of slender means and craving for rulership (Sn. 1.6. PTS. p.13 ff.). This type of immoral conduct directly or indirectly causes destruction of wealth. The Six Channels of Dissipation of Wealth elaborated in the Siṅgālovāda Sutta (DN. 31. WPB. p. 461.) are (i) Indulgence in intoxicants, (ii) Sauntering in streets at unseemly hours which, (iii) Frequenting theatrical shows, (iv) Indulgence in gambling, (v) Association with evil companions and (vi) Addiction to idleness.

Implications can be drawn from the Ugga Sutta (AN. 7.7 WPB. p. 1001 – 1002.) that loss of one's property to the Five Enemies – water or flood, fire or conflagrations, thieves, tyrants or bad leaders and unloved heirs like bad sons and daughters may cause poverty.

5. STABILITY AND RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTION & CONSUMPTION OF WEALTH

As the Vyagghapajja Sutta reveals a householder knowing his income and expenses should lead a balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, knowing that thus his income will stand in excess of his expenses, but not his expenses in excess of his income (AN. 8.54 (4). WPB. p. 1195). The four sources for the increase of amassed wealth through right livelihood or right living, namely: (1) avoidance of debauchery, (2) avoidance of drunkenness, (3) non-indulgence in gambling, (4) friendship, companionship and intimacy with the good should be adopted to lead a simple and balanced life (AN. 8.54 (4). WPB. p. 1195). According to the above Sutta, a householder lives well in the present life when he is active in doing good, heedful and circumspective, equanimous in livelihood and careful with his savings (AN. . 8.54 (4). WPB. p.1194) (*uṭṭhātā kammadheyyesu, appamatto vidhānavā; Samam kappeti jīvikam sambhatam anurakkhati*). Earning of wealth righteously and right uses of wealth conduce to balanced living. As the Sīṅgālovāda Sutta illustrates, the Buddha gives instructions to the young householder, Sīgālaka on how wealth is earned righteously and the four ways to spend one's wealth by a wise man endowed with virtue in order to lead a fruitful, wholesome and balanced life. They are explicated through similes thus. The wise one who is endowed with virtue will shine like a beacon-fire. He gathers wealth like a bee gathering honey or like ants piling up their hill (*paṇḍito sīlasampanno jalam aggīva bhāsati, Bhoge samharamānassa, bhamarasseva iriyato; Bhogā sannicayam yanti, vammikovupacīyati.*) (DN. 31. WPB. p. 466.). The four ways to spend wealth mean that wealth can be divided into four portions (*Catudhā vibhaje bhoge, sa ve mittāni ganthati*). He enjoys one portion of wealth, with two portions he manages his work or profession or business (investment), the fourth portion is to be deposited to be used in times of misfortune and the last part for fulfilling obligations (*Ekena bhoge bhuñjeyya, dvihi kammam payojaye; Catutthañca nidhāpeyya, āpadāsu bhavissatī ti*) (DN. 31. WPB. p. 466.). The right uses of wealth that has been righteously obtained are also conducive to balanced living according to the Pattakamma Sutta (AN. 4.61 (1). WPB. p. 449.) Wealth

should be used for dependents, for overcoming misfortunes, for giving donations and for making the five offerings or oblations – to kin, guests, the departed, kings and the gods – this has been recommended by the virtuous who live spiritually (AN. 4.61 (1). WPB. p. 451.) (*Bhuttā bhogā bhatā bhaccā, vitinnā āpadāsu me; uddhaggā dakkhiṇā dinnā, atho pañcabalikatā; upaṭṭhitā sīlavanto, saññatā brahmacārayo*).

6. POSSESSION OF ABUNDANT WEALTH & DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

As the Aputtaka Sutta (SN. 3 .19. PTS. S i 89) shows that the Buddha says that when a person of no integrity acquires abundant wealth, he does not provide for his own pleasure and satisfaction, or for the pleasure and satisfaction of his parents, his wife and children; his slaves, servants, and assistants; his friends. He does not offer priests and contemplatives. When his wealth is not properly put to use, kings make off with it, or thieves make off with it, or fire burns it, or water sweeps it away, or hateful heirs make off with it. Thus, his wealth, not properly put to use, goes to waste and not to any good use. The Buddha further says that when a person of integrity acquires lavish wealth, he provides for his own pleasure and satisfaction, for the pleasure and satisfaction of his parents, his wife and children; his slaves, servants, and assistants; and his friends. He offers priests and contemplatives offerings. When his wealth is properly put to use, kings do not make off with it, thieves do not make off with it, fire does not burn it, water does not sweep it away, and hateful heirs do not make off with it. Thus his wealth, properly put to use, goes to a good use and not to waste. The Appaka Sutta affirms that few are those people in the world who, when acquiring bountiful wealth, do not become intoxicated and heedless, do not become greedy for sensual pleasures, and do not mistreat other beings. Many more are those who, when acquiring bountiful wealth, become intoxicated and heedless, become greedy for sensual pleasures, and mistreat other beings (SN. 6 (6). WPB. p. 169.).

The Buddha, in the Vyagghapajja Sutta, instructs rich householders how to preserve and increase their prosperity and how to avoid loss of wealth. Wealth alone, however, does not make a complete man or a harmonious society. Possession of wealth often

multiplies man's desires, and he is ever in the pursuit of amassing more wealth and power. This unrestrained craving, however, leaves him dissatisfied and hampers his inner growth. It creates conflict and disharmony in society through the resentment of the underprivileged who feel themselves exploited by the effects of unrestrained craving. Therefore, the Buddha advises householders to gain material welfare with four essential conditions for spiritual welfare: confidence in the Buddha's enlightenment, virtue, liberality and wisdom. These four will instill in man a sense of higher values. He will then not only pursue his own material concern, but also be aware of his duty toward society. To mention only one of the implications: a wisely and generously employed liberality will reduce tensions and conflicts in society. Thus, the observing of these conditions of material and spiritual welfare will make for an ideal citizen in an ideal society. Some wholesome factors that develop wealth earning through righteous business and trading can be shown according to the *Siṅgālovāda Sutta*. For instance, a factory owner, businessman or any entrepreneur who is engaged in wealth earning business should perform certain ethical obligations towards the employees recruited in his business process. Simultaneously, employees and servants of all ranks engaged in work under employers should also perform certain ethical obligations towards their masters. This will lead to increase in production, wealth, wages, stability of production and wealth as well as satisfaction and mutual confidence paving way for no strikes or such disturbances (DN. 31. WPB. p. 468).

7. RIGHTEOUS WEALTH FOR PEACEFUL LIVING

The right uses of wealth that has been righteously obtained are also conducive to balanced living according to the *Pattakamma Sutta* (AN. 4.61 (1). WPB. p. 449ff). Wealth should be used for dependents, for overcoming misfortunes, for giving donations and for making the five offerings – to kin, guests, the departed, kings and the gods – this has been recommended by the virtuous who live spiritually (*Bhuttā bhogā bhatā bhaccā, vitinṇā āpadāsu me, uddhaggā dakkhiṇā dinnā, atho pañcabalikatā, upatṭhitā sīlavanto, saññatā brahamacārayo*) (AN. 4.61 (1). WPB. p. 450ff). The *Vyagghapajja Sutta* exposes four conditions that conduce to worldly progress and development of wealth – (i) the accomplishment of persistent

effort (*uṭṭhāna-sampadā*), (ii) the accomplishment of watchfulness (*ārakkha-sampadā*), (iii) Good friendship (*kalyāṇamittatā*) and (iv) Balanced livelihood (*sama-jīvikatā*) (AN. 8.54 (4), WPB. p. 1194). The same concept is elucidated in the Pattakamma Sutta (AN. 4.61 (1). WPB. p. 449ff). According to the accomplishment of persistent effort (*uṭṭhāna-sampadā*), a householder by whatsoever activity earns his living, whether by farming, by trading, by rearing cattle, by archery, by service under the king, or by any other kind of craft — at that he becomes skillful and is not lazy. He is endowed with the power of discernment as to the proper ways and means; he is able to carry out and allocate duties. As per the accomplishment of watchfulness (*ārakkha-sampadā*), a householder whatsoever wealth is in possession of, obtained by dint of effort, collected by strength of arm, by the sweat of his brow, justly acquired by right means by guarding and watching so that kings would not seize it, thieves would not steal it, fire would not burn it, water would not carry it away, nor ill-disposed heirs remove it. According to Balanced livelihood (*sama-jīvikatā*), a householder knowing his income and expenses leads a balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, knowing that thus his income will stand in excess of his expenses, but not his expenses in excess of his income. A householder with a large income were to lead a wretched life, there would be those who say this person will die like a starveling.

8. RIGHTEOUS WEALTH AND HAPPINESS

Adiya Sutta deals with benefits to be obtained from wealth. The Buddha talked about five benefits and satisfaction that can be obtained from righteously earned wealth to Anāthapiṇḍika, the householder (AN. 5.41 (1). WPB. p. 665). The wealth should be earned and gained righteously through his efforts and enterprise, amassed through the strength of his arm, and piled up through the sweat of his brow. Such wealth provides him with pleasure and satisfaction. He can maintain that pleasure rightly. He provides his parents with pleasure and satisfaction, and maintains that pleasure rightly. He provides his children, his wife, his slaves, servants and assistants with pleasure and satisfaction, and maintains that pleasure rightly. The Pattakamma Sutta also exposes some significant factors in this regard (AN. 4.61 (1). WPB. p. 449 – 452). The Āṇaṇya Sutta

introduces the four kinds of bliss that can be attained in the proper season, on the proper occasions, by a householder – (i) the bliss of having wealth (*atthisukha*), (ii) the bliss of making use of wealth (*bhogasukha*), (iii) the bliss of debtlessness (*ānānyasukha*) and (iv) the bliss of blamelessness (*anavajjasukha*) (AN. 4.62 (2). WPB. p. 452 – 453).

9. CONCLUSION

Irresponsible productions and unrighteous wealth and absence of adequate wealth, wealth earned through wrong livelihood and irresponsible consumption of wealth destroy health, environment, peace and harmony in the society. A Buddhist approach with universally applicable teachings to restore responsible, humanistic, environmental friendly and wholesome production (righteous earning) based on right livelihood and responsible consumption of wealth should be adopted for the restoration of a peaceful and sustainable society.

ABBREVIATIONS

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| AN: | <i>Anguttara Nikāya</i> |
| Dhp: | <i>Dhammapada</i> |
| DN: | <i>Dīgha Nikāya</i> |
| MN: | <i>Majjhima Nikāya</i> |
| PTS: | Pali Text Society |
| SN: | <i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i> |
| Sp: | <i>Suttanipāta / Sutta–Nipāta</i> |
| WPB: | Wisdom Publication, Boston |

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