

BUDDHIST WAY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Human covered all space to conquer, rule and change the whole environment for their suitable and comfortable adaptation. With such intervention in natural mechanism, man was unknown to the fact that some invisible demonic consequences are following him when he is crossing all the natural barriers to demolish hills, destroy forests and diminishing water sources and demonstrating his powers to create or finish anything anywhere. Such disastrous way of consumption came to be known in form of acid rain, floods, rise of sea level, drought and famine. The people started introspecting their conduct and think to refrain their activities to sustain the resources for future. Sustainable development is a process that requires use of existing resources without compromising it for future generation. It requires to visualize the world as a system that connects space and time. One of the key principles of Buddhist teachings, pratityasamutpāda or inter-dependent co-arising or dependent origination which sees all things and phenomena as interdependent and arising from multiple cause and conditions is clearly consistent with the Sustainable development. The pillars of establishing socio- economic development and equalities are elucidated in the various Buddhist sutras. It shows that because of craving all sufferings and struggle originate. The Buddha explained the ways to earn and share the wealth virtuously and trail the path of spirituality to establish sustainable development, peace, and harmony in the society.

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Buddhism is against the lustful attachment towards insatiable things. Consumption according to Buddhism is not the final goal of a society. In the above perspective the paper will examine the various approaches of sustainable development and responsible consumption.

The concept of growth was evolved in the sphere of social sciences for the guidance of new nation who won their independence after the Second World War (1939-45). Indeed, the idea of development itself was not new. Early indications of this idea are found in the social thought of nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It was largely expressed in the theory of social change. This change could be conceived as the transition from simple to complex forms, from less efficient to more efficient forms, or ordinary to better forms. 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 (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.

Development is primarily a positive phenomenon. It stands for improvement of human life in all spheres. But when it comes

to economic sphere, some of its negative effects have also been noted. Economic development demands higher production which involves exploitation of natural resources. In the modern age of gigantic machines operated by huge energy resources to meet ever-growing demand for consumption, the process of exploitation of natural resources has become very fast. Can this process continue indefinitely? Do we have unlimited stock of natural resources? Does their mindless exploitation as well as the pattern of our consumption have an ill effect on our environment? if so, what can we do to stop an imminent disaster? These are the questions which have stirred the minds of the champions of 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. 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). This stream of consciousness has promoted international attention to environment-friendly development. Over the last thirty years, there have been many active movements towards sustainable development. The UN General Assembly and related agencies have approved the Sustainable Development Goals to replace the Millennium Development Goals after 2015. Although many UN and other development organizations have declared high priority to work towards Sustainable Development Goals, they are likely to focus on the old framework of green growth or quality growth with environmental friendliness. In this regard, Buddhist theories and practices, focusing on inner cheerfulness, well support holistic sustainable development. The inner happiness focused sustainable

development may be called “Buddhist Sustainable Development”, driven by the “Buddhist sustainable happiness” path or happiness at high (mind and wisdom) levels.

In 1983, the UN established the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) or called “Brundtland Commission” as an independent agency and published an important report - *Our Common Future* (1987), providing the definition of sustainable development (WCED, 1987 :43) as:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concept: 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.

Sustainability 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 programme 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.

As ecology-based concept emphasizes the ecological imperatives of carrying capacity, bio-diversity, and biotic resilience, human capital cannot effectively substitute for the vital contributions provided by ecological systems. All living things are related naturally and support each other in using and re-using natural resources, If one living species increases in population, this imbalance would affect the entire ecological system. Therefore, the increase in human population growth and consumption growth would affect the system balance. This imbalance is also enhanced by technology. Since the industrial revolution, human beings have utilized massive amounts of resources for the sharp increases in production and consumption.

The heart of the Buddha’s teachings is the *tilakkhaṇa*, the Three Signs of Being, which describes that every phenomenon is conditioned and shares three fundamental characteristics: (i) *anicca* or impermanence, (ii) *dukkha* or unsatisfactoriness, and (iii) *anattā* or the lack of permanent self. Its most important occurrences in the Pāli Canon are collected by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (2008). The *tilakkhaṇa* is the foundation of Buddhist theory and practice. The most important of them from the thread of this paper is the first one, *anicca*: impermanence or transience.

According to *anicca*, there is nothing in the phenomenal world, which is not subjected to ongoing change. The human world and its environment stands or falls with the type of moral force at work. If immorality grips society humankind and nature declines. If morality exists the quality of human life and nature improve (*Atthasālini*, 854). Buddha says that if change is universal; neither man nor any other being, animate or inanimate are being absolved of it. Every thing is framed in constant process of change (*AnguttarNikaya*, IV.108). In his doctrine of impermanence (*ksanikavada*) he explains transitory nature of things and says ‘whatever exist arises from causes and conditions and in every respect impermanent’ (*Mahāparinirvāna Sutta*, 9). The human kind is also a part of nature and no sharp distinction can be drawn between them and their surrounding, as everything is impermanent and subject to same natural laws. It

must be seen as an important basis for proper understanding the role of humankind of human kind in nature. Nothing is everlasting, unchanging, permanent or stable. Impermanence is the very core of the Buddha's teachings.

The concept of suffering suggests that all humans are suffering. They are wanting to have what they do not have or they are wanting to remove what they have. They want to change their condition. Status maintenance is suffering. The desire for change, the definition of suffering, is itself suffering. This is true in all socio-economic, political and cultural contexts. In absence of industrialization and economic development we "suffer" from poverty; in presence of them we "suffer" from environmental consequences of them. It appears that the concept of happiness is vacuous. The Buddha proposes that happiness comes from wisdom and from avoiding the extremes, i.e. it comes from a middle position. We may also look for ways through which we can have development without environmental problems. Yet, this option has to be exercised carefully and reflectively. It requires a vivid recognition of the environmental problems, along with analysis of the problems, and search for solutions emerging from this analysis and not from old political and philosophical discourses.

The concepts of sustainability refer to a process in which a certain state of being is sustained: the preservation of a particular state of existence. It is motivated by longing for constancy. From the point of impermanence, the aim of sustainability cannot be accomplished, as the Buddhist worldview does not admit permanence, which is implied in its notion. As every phenomenon is subjected to decay and cessation, sustainability cannot be achieved directly. Therefore clinging to its realization cannot be interpreted as anything other than a striving, which results in suffering.

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* (S.V., 241) 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 i. Right View, ii. Right Thought, iii. Right Speech,

iv. Right Action, v. Right Livelihood, vi. Right Effort, vii. Right Mindfulness and viii. Right Concentration. In the *Culavedalla Sutta* (M.III,p.248) Bhikkhuni Dhamadonna explains to Visakha, that the Noble Eightfold Path is included in the threefold training—namely, morality (*śīla*) 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.

The conception of development is included in the Dhamma, but with three main differences as it is interpreted in the mainstream approach: (1) the development process is an inner, spiritual progress (exclusive material development is not praised and not important above a necessary level for one's inner advancement); (2) the development process is not a direct goal in itself, but a direct consequence of the purification of the human character; (3) the development is not sustainable, rather is emerging as a by-product of ongoing practice.

As it is also articulated, ensuring necessary material background is essential for spiritual development. The four basic needs must be met before spiritual development can be achieved or even started. That is why applying appropriate social activities is crucial to ensure them, as it is emphasized in the spirit of the Millennium Development Goals.

It could be argued that sustainable development is strongly associated with a moral imperative that apparently no one can ignore or reject, without having to provide a very good reason for dissent, content, interpretation and the implementation of this. Buddhism propounds same undertaking between human and development. Teachings in the *paticcasamuppada* are the guiding principles toward learning how to make a choice that will produce the outcome beneficial to life, to last and to sustain for they will constantly keep the people far away from the unbounded desires. One of the key principles of Buddhist teachings, *paticcasamuppada* or inter-dependent co-arising or dependent origination which

sees all things and phenomena as interdependent and arising from multiple cause and conditions is clearly consistent with the Sustainable development. The Buddhist virtues, precepts and principles are the foundations which develop peace, happiness, harmony, compassion, wisdom, care, sharing and socio-economic equality in the society. The inter-relation between man and nature influence social institution and also creates numerous social problems. When these problems go beyond the control of man, governments are forced to intervene, and this is well illustrated in the *Agganna Sutta*. The *Cakkavattisihanad Sutta* (*DighaNikaya*, III, 61) and the *Kutadanta Sutta* also insist on the necessity of a state policy regarding sustainable approach towards life.

The *Dhammapada* (V.183) says that men driven by fear seek refuge in forest groves, trees and mountains. Man got frightened of nature because he failed to understand nature. The *Agganna Sutta* explains how things manifest clearly when their origins are known. It (*Digha Nikaya* III, 80) very vividly brings out the essential relations among human nature, environment, ethics, politics and economy. The message that the canon offers is that sustainable approaches could be solved only by understanding the doctrine of Dependent origination. The *Dhammapada* (V. 80) which says irrigators lead the waters, carpenters bend the wood, the wise control themselves.

Both the *Sigalovada Sutta* and the *Dhammapada* employ the simile of a bee that collects honey from flowers without harming it, to explain how a person, who properly understands the workings of nature, taps it for his benefit. Not only does the bees not harm the flower, but helps the process of pollination. The Buddhist admonition is to utilize resources in the same way as a bee collects pollen from flowered, neither polluting its beauty nor depleting its fragrance. Just as the bee manufactures honey out of pollen, so man should be able to find happiness and fulfilment in life without harming the natural world in which he lives (Silva, 1972:9). The natural resources is not a divine creation effected for the use of man and, hence one should not consider that nature is meant solely for one's benefit. Instead, men should accept the right of all other beings to live on earth. Man gets the opportunity of living on earth only if there is harmony among humans, animals and plant life. The *Metta*

Sutta conveys this message and the *Bhuripanna Jataka*. Describes the breaking of a branch that provides shade as an unfriendly act. It is popularly accepted that the Buddha, too, showed gratitude to the Bodhi tree under which he attained Enlightenment. It can be said (Douglas, 2011:17) that the Buddhists take pride in their sensitivity and atonement to nature.

It is essential that man should realize that he is merely a part of nature. The danger of being ignorant of this fact is well explained. Man has been so much enchanted by scientific and technological progress that he is misled into believing that he has almost completely conquered nature and has control over it. He also believes that with his conquest of nature, all problems will be solved and heaven will be established on earth. But he is not aware that nature that he thinks he has conquered is not the whole of it, but only a part of it, possibly a half of it, that is the external material world. The other half is within himself, the nature of man or the man as a part of nature. In the process of struggle to conquer the material world of nature man even often neglects his responsibility to master the inner nature within himself and tends to lose control over it. Conversely this inner nature has grown stronger and has taken much control over him (Rajavaramuni, 1987:31). Due to this misconception about his superiority over nature man unwittingly gets self- alienated. It is only man who can realize the relation between man and nature. This is the very reason why he should act in an enlightened manner.

The *Vanaropa Sutta* also focuses the attention on the importance of protection, conservation and development. This *Sutta* says people who are engaged in such activities will prosper both in this world as well as in the next (*Samyutta Nikaya* I. 33). It draws attention to such aspects as planting of trees, forests orchards, construction of bridges and houses, supply of water etc (Wimalaratana, 1989:32) all of which are, at present, projects undertaken at national and even global level. Environmental problems were not so rampant during the Buddha's time, hence, this shows how futuristic is the Buddha's approach regarding sustainability.

Deforestation, water-pollution, lack of a proper system of irrigation are causing severe problems at present. The Buddha's foresight with regard to this is seen from the *Kimdada Sutta* of *Samyuttanikaya* (I.

32) which describes the giver of a house as the giver of everything. The stress and irritation caused by pollution of sound is also a major cause of worry in the present world, and the Buddha has focussed his attention on this aspect of environmental pollution (Arvi, 1978: 118). Many *Suttas* clearly say that the contemporaries of the Buddha were much surprised by the quietitude adopted by the Buddha and his disciples. The *Samannaphala Sutta* (*Digha Nikaya*: I.50.) of the *Digha Nikaya* says that King Ajatassattu was somewhat apprehensive about the dead sojourning with a large following of disciples. In fact, he suspected whether this arranged visit of his to the Buddha was a plot to hand him over to his enemies. When selecting places of residence for monks solitude and noiselessness of the place were given special consideration (*Vinaya Pitaka*: I, 39). The Buddha often advised monks that they should either engage in righteous talk or maintain golden silence. (*Majjhima Nikaya*: P.II) The *Bhayabherava Sutta* points out that even the slightest sound could disturb an uncontrolled mind (*Majjhima Nikaya*: P.II) Professor Lily de Silva very eloquently brings out the chaotic consequences of sound pollution that takes place at present. (Silva, 1987:22)

The solution for this suffering lies in the practice of spirituality. Buddhist Middle Path balances both spirituality and materialism to lead the contended life on the principles of sharing and caring. Buddhist virtues, precepts and principles focus on establishing peace and harmony through spiritual and socio-economic development in the society. The virtue regulates the behaviour, strengthens the meditation in turn develops wisdom. The virtue tends to elevate the man which all can cultivate irrespective of creed, colour, race, or sex, the earth can be transformed into a paradise where all can live in perfect peace and harmony as ideal citizens of one world. The Buddha, with great compassion for the world, required his followers to practice the four boundless states (*appamanna*) of loving kindness (*metta*), of compassion (*karuna*), of sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and of equanimity (*upekkha*). This practice of 'metta' or universal love, begins by suffusing one's own mind with universal love (*metta*) and then pervading it to one's family, then to the neighbours, then to the village, country and the four corners of the Universe. It is time that one will take the middle path in using our natural resources. We could no longer senselessly overexploit our

resources and use up our natural energy without sustaining them for the future generations.

The practice of *pancaśīla* as advocated by the Buddha--- (i) To abstain from killing and harming any living being-The first *śīla* tells protection of every human and animals. It means the abstinence from destruction of life. We should not kill any living being. Buddha taught never to destroy the hate any being. We should develop kindness and love towards all creatures. Non-violence is a fundamental tenet in Buddhism. Ahimsa promotes non-harming attitudes to fellow human beings and eco system. Reverence for all forms of life is a crucial practical virtue in this tenet. Gentleness in all actions of body, speech and mind creates a healthy cultural and religious value that celebrates sustainable environment. (ii) To abstain from frivolous speech or falsity- Buddha teaches abstention from lying through fourth *sīla*. Everyone should avoid all kind of lies. *Suttanipata* states when one comes to an assembly or gathering, he should not tell lies to any one, or causes any to tell lies, or consent to the acts of those who tell lies; he should avoid every kind of untruth. Humans should stay away from the lie. He should not sacrifice the truth in any situation. (iii) To abstain from stealing or taking which is not given—It means to accept anything without provided any kind of a person is theft. The Buddha says that a disciple knowing the *Dhamma* should refrain from stealing anything at any place, should not cause another to steal anything, and should not consent to the acts of those who steal anything, should avoid every kind of theft. (iv) To abstain from any evil lustful conduct in lapse of *Brahmaccarya* practice by body, by speech and by mind—The fourth *sīla* educates to abstain from sexual immorality. The world's most violent excitement is sexuality. Therefore, people should always stay away from sexuality. (v) To abstain from intoxicating drinks and narcotic drugs—Buddha educates all the human staying away from all types alcohol and drugs through the last modesty. A good householder who is interested in virtues, he should not take any drugs. Who are drinkers it should not support them? The alcohol makes a man frantic or mad. Ignorant people do evil actions by taking alcohol. You should refrain from it. This produces sin. This creates madness and it is the home of ignorance. Intoxication destroys glory of a person before the society. This gives

rise to conflict and disease. Individual do not care his garments. Person does not care self-pride and become incapable of learning. It is concluded that these *Pancasila* which revealed by Buddha are socially strong and human beneficial. Societies accept any theories according its time and country. It is the influence of Buddhism that society does not respect such kind any person who is violent, theft, lies, and adulterer in the modern era of 21st century. When the *Pancasila* should make a part of human life then they (*Pancasila*) will be relevant.

Buddhism teaches us the manner in which to consume these elements. To a monk who has newly been initiated into the sangha, the knowledge of such matter is fundamental to the learning to the learning and practicing of the Buddhist precepts. It teaches him to use his intellect to examine carefully the objects being consumed and their end results. He is trained to be vigilant over the five sensual organs. Once fully understood how these senses interact on the mind, he is made to learn have command over them so they do not veer from the desired path.

The ethical teachings of Buddhism ask us to purify the mind to control our desire. It observes that being greedy, human beings want to take as much as they can from the earth and from others to satisfy their immediate wants without consideration for the future. Any kind of devaluation of other creatures and rating them in lower levels than human beings empathetically disconnect us from the harmonious principle of nature and lead us to harm to others as well as to ourselves. It is this moral dimension of ecological problems which may be addressed from the ethical perspective of Indian religious and philosophical tradition. Vinaya also contains an instruction to Bhikkhu to 'recycle old robes' (II) and 'not to pollute water or green grass with urine or excrement' (IV). In Aśoka's inscriptions, we find instruction for preservation of medicinal plants with special care because both human and animal species require these for getting rid of ailments. All these show that the Buddhist way of living used to honour with gratefulness the inner rhythm of nature. This is very close to a modern use of preserving bio diversity. (Sharma and Labh, 2016: 279)

It is possible to conclude that Buddhist point of view it is only

an intelligent person who can properly understand this relation, man should not be frightened of nature, but should understand it, through this understanding he should make the best use of nature, even changing and adjusting it when necessary. This changes and adjustment should be effected without harming nature, instead should enhance and foster nature, man should, through the use of these nature resources, produce things, while conserving nature man should also appreciate it, man should never consider himself to be superior to nature, but instead should consider himself to be a part and parcel of it, the man should consider that destruction of nature amounts to his own destruction and man should develop his personality in a way that enables him to love it.

Sahni claims that early Buddhism may be seen as virtue ethics and the Jatak stories particularly show the concern about environment. Stephanie Kaza has produced several books which provides a framework of Buddhist thought on sustainable development and foreconomic, ecological, ethical sustainability for the long term. She shows how mindfulness and relational thinking can help in dealing with inequalities and environmental crisis. One of the most known books on sustainable development in academics is E.F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* (Schumacher, 1973). He is one of the first generation of economists conceptualizing sustainable development as the result of value based economics. Interestingly, he called his economic thought by the name of Buddhist economics. Schumacher is inspired by the eightfold path of Buddha that one needs to follow to attain the ultimate goal of life. This includes right livelihood among the eight paths. According to the Buddha a man has to earn a livelihood but it should be done legally and peacefully. Dealing in weapons, dealing in living beings, working in meat production and butchery, and selling intoxicants and poisons should be avoided. To quote from *Small Is Beautiful* again (1973) "From the point of view of Buddhist economics, therefore, production from local resources for local needs is the most rational way of economic life, while dependence on imports from afar and the consequent need to produce for export to unknown and distant peoples is highly uneconomic and justifiable only in exceptional cases and on a small scale. Just as the modern economist would admit that a high rate of consumption of transport services between

a man's home and his place of work signifies a misfortune and not a high standard of life, so the Buddhist economist would hold that to satisfy human wants from faraway sources rather than from sources nearby signifies failure rather than success. The former tends to take statistics showing an increase in the number of ton/miles per head of the population carried by a country's transport system as proof of economic progress, while to the latter-the Buddhist economist--the same statistics would indicate a highly undesirable deterioration in the pattern of consumption.

In recent times in India Dr Ambedkar has produced some important works on Buddha: *Buddha and his Dhamma*; *Buddha and Karl Marx*; and *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (incomplete treatise). Ambedkar also pondered on development and environment. Ambedkar's ideas on environment are based on two concepts: "nature for all" and "all for nature". The ideas of Ambedkar prompts us that environmental governance should be crafted based upon the principle of equity and bio-ethical spirit to cater to the needs of all sections of human society. In a way, Ambedkar's ideas enable us to focus on ecological democracy and inclusive environmentalism, meaning environment for all. Particularly his engagement with Buddhism proposes a bio-centric approach to look at social process. This means all species including human beings have equal rights over nature and at the same time all human beings has responsibility to participate in conservation of environment. (Ravi,2014: 24-34).

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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