

SIGNIFICANCE OF BUDDHIST TEACHINGS FOR THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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What is meant by development? Miscellaneous answers have been given to this question. In the Western model of development, it is economic development that stands out as the obvious answer. The technical and scientific development can be identified as the by-products of economic development. If there is an obvious commercial development of a country, that is considered as signs of its economic development. However, Buddhist concept of development is different from these interpretations. Furthermore, the concept of Buddhist economic development is quite different from these teachings on economic development. Buddhism values spiritual development above material development. In Buddhism, the zenith of development is taught as *nibbāna*. All the teachings in Buddhism are aimed at leading on the path to spiritual liberation. Therefore, some scholars doubt whether there could be any teaching related to economic development in such a path based on principles leading to *nibbāna*. Realization of global targets is not the goal of Buddhism. The economic principles taught in Buddhism are based on world friendly beneficial philosophy based on the right live-hood (*sammā-ājīva*). Economic principles taught in Buddhism are *nibbana* oriented. Accordingly, there are two outstanding stages in Buddhist teaching:

1. Material Development (Financial development)
2. Spiritual Development (Mental Health)

Both these aspects of development are taught in Buddhism. Therefore, the development in external objects in terms of economic as well as the resulting spiritual development is appreciated in Buddhist teachings. These two features are represented in the '*Aṇana-sutta*' in the '*Catukka-nipāta* of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. The satisfaction or pleasure such as '*atthi*' (*the bliss of having*), '*bhoga*' (*the bliss of wealth*) and '*aṇana*' (*the bliss of debtlessness*) represent materialistic development. The pleasure of '*anavajja*' (*the bliss of blamelessness*) or the 'righteous living' is considered as spiritual development.¹ A selfish economic principle that depends on limitless desires and uncivilized principles is not approved in Buddhism. Real

economic development is the financial success nourished by humane values. Accordingly, Buddhist economic principles advocate both financial and spiritual progress.

In Asia, especially in Sri Lanka, about the economic development, these principles based on financial factors, health, education and road development etc. recognized as crucial guidelines. Here, although these principles may not be criticized, existing in the Buddhist economic philosophy, but not seen in the targets of modern principles, important aspects should be pointed out. That means the ethical development to be pursued in parallel with economic development. Ethics is based on '*sīla*' (*virtue*). Hence, as a main characteristic of economic development combined with spiritual development, ethical development should be accompanied. That represents the quantitative and qualitative expectations which are the catalyst of a healthy economy.

Several special objectives can be identified within the economic frame-work introduced by the new principles that have been subjected to special attention: among them, reviving the private sector, encouraging foreign direct investment, prioritizing investment carefully, diversification of the monetary pattern and strong financial services and stability of the capital market must be mentioned as prominent. It is clear that all these aims should be fulfilled through ordinary people. Therefore, what should be attempted before everything else are the advantages for the common man. The reason for this is that in an economic system aimed at generating profit, there has to be expenditure too. Gaining profit without spending something is not within economics. According to Buddhist vision of economics there are two mandatory requirements for economic development:

1. Development of human quality
2. Training a man as a skilled laborer to provide labor

In the economic philosophy of Buddhism one of the basic principles taught for improving the economic strength of the country is eliminating poverty of the population. The first step for achieving this end, according to the Buddha is building a strong economy through the contribution of labor of the people by spending money by the state. The main cause for spreading corruption, fraud, etc. in a country is poverty. Therefore, through the economic development of a country poverty should be eliminated. Thus, it is clear that before attempting for technological

and scientific development, the state must consider improving the economic conditions of the people. That will contribute to the ethical development of the people as well.

How should the state function in relation to economic development according to Buddhist teachings?

For the development of human qualities, what matters in economics is employment. Through socially beneficial professions, there will be improvement of ethical conditions too. That is a progress that will happen socially as well as personally. This progress will lead to a developed economy. The relationship between the state and the economy is inseparable. The relationship between the people and the state is based on the economy and security. Therefore, according to the statement '*rakkhāvaraṇa guttiṃ samvidahati*'- the duty of the state is to provide security, protection and safety for the people.

In the Buddhist canon, there are two *sutta*-s that contain ideas about the concept of state and economy i.e., the *Kūtadanta-sutta* and the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*. The *Kūtadanta-sutta* highlights three factors for the development of economy:

Ye bhoto rañño janapade ussahanti kasigorakkhe, tesam bhavaṃ rājā bījabhattaṃ anuppadetu. (to those in the kingdom who are engaged in cultivating crops and raising cattle, let Your Majesty distribute grain and fodder) *Ye bhoto rañño janapade ussahanti vāñijjāya, tesam bhavaṃ rājā pābhataṃ anuppadetu.* (to those in trade, give capital) *Ye bhoto rañño janapade ussahanti rājaporise, tesam bhavaṃ rājā bhattavetaṇaṃ pakappetu*² (to those in government service assign proper living wages)

The first method this *sutta* proposes is granting necessary resources for cattle breeding and agriculture in the country. The next responsibility of the state is arranging for the development of trade in the country and providing facilities and protection for the state employees. This is how the state should act in economics. According to this, agriculture, trade and state service comprise the economic power of a country. But how they are implemented is not very clear.

In Sri Lanka, previous governments as well as the current government have introduced a number of policies for the development of agriculture. However, basically the decrease in the quality of paddy and rice, land disputes, problems in the use of fertilizers and pesticides have hindered the

smooth implementation of such policies and solving of such problems and providing facilities for selling farm products will be necessary for rapid economic development of the country.

From the commercial point of view, concessionary loan systems and reasonable taxation should be introduced. A systematic organization of the state service too would be useful for the stability of the government.

Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-sutta also carries some important ideas on the economy of a country. The principal teaching here is regarding security. Further, it discusses the improvement of the economy by giving wealth to the poor. This discourse discusses not helping the poor with financial assistance leads to social decline. Giving money to the poor and employing them would create new job opportunities. That will further strengthen the economy of the country, to enhance the gross national productivity and create new job opportunities for the future.³

There is doubt about the progress of the economic development projects proposed by the previous government as well as the present government. It is in fact questionable how far the proposed principles would be useful for making Sri Lanka a developed country. A careful reading of the Central Bank report will show how far these proposals have been put into practice.

- Borrowing Money

Borrowing money cannot be considered as a good economic device. Buddhism has not banned borrowing. But if a poor man takes loans of money, he cannot experience any pleasure from it and it might cause further suffering as the *Īṇa-sutta* has explained.⁴ (Poverty is suffering. If one borrows money due to poverty that leads to suffering. When it is difficult to settle the loan then there will be remorse and pain in the mind.)

Therefore, borrowing money to get rid of economic difficulties is a matter one should consider several times before borrowing. If one does not attempt to settle the loans and taking more loans for settling the current loans cannot be approved as a wise method. The main reason for a country to be burdened by debt is the result of bad management. According to Buddhism, the basic needs are the four requisites. (food, clothing, shelter, medicine) Any living being can survive on the four requisites. All other needs arise from desire and greed and they only cause longer suffering in life. Whatever it is, there should be a proper management in a state.

According to the Buddhist teaching there are four factors that cause decline of a state or any organization. They are:

1. Not replenishing what is spent
2. Not repairing the things decayed
3. Making use of resources not knowing their necessity and limits
4. A person unrestrained in word and body becoming the ruler⁵

The prime signs of sustainable development are the pleasure of not being in debt or the ‘*anana sukha*’. Whether Sri Lanka is blessed with such an economic vision is a problem.

Buddhism and a macro-economic philosophy

In order to understand the functioning of the entire economy, the international economists, gross national productivity, rate of unemployment and the price index study should be considered on the whole. The economists study the relationship of national income, productivity, consumption, inflation, savings, investment, international trade and international monetary impacts and try to enhance their inter-connections. However, through these criteria represented in the ‘universal economy’ what is measured is the economic standard of a country. These are just based on external objects. The criteria given in Buddhism are different from them. Buddhism has paid special attention for the quality of economic development and whether it is beneficial for society.

- ✓ ‘*Sammā ājīva*’ includes the professions related to the layman’s life such as ‘*kasiyā*’- agriculture, ‘*vaṇijjā*’- trade, ‘*rājaporisa*’- military service etc. Then trade in ‘*satta vaṇijjā*’ - selling animals, ‘*sattha vaṇijjā*’- selling arms, *maṃsa vaṇijjā* - selling flesh, *majja vaṇijjā* - selling alcohol and ‘*visa vaṇijjā*’ selling poison have been rejected in Buddhism. However, in the macro-economic system, as financial power is the main concern, means of earning wealth is not considered as important. Buddhism approves earning of wealth like a bee collecting nectar from flowers or like white –ants building anthills.

“In collecting wealth behave like the bee, Wealth should be collected, like building of an anthill”⁶

- ✓ In Buddhism, only the socially beneficial things are accepted in the production sector. The products harmful to social welfare and increasing cankers are rejected. In the process of consumption, need and economical use is given priority in Buddhism
- ✓ The *Sīṅgālovāda-sutta* in the *Dīgha-nikāya* contains special instruction on savings and investment. According to it, by dividing the income into four parts, the first part is for consumption, two parts for investment and the fourth part to save for future use.⁷ In the Western economic system we do not see such division. Its main concern is expenditure for economic development.
- ✓ In the sustainable development, the principle is making use of the natural resources and conserving them for future use. Thus, sustainable development emphasizes the use of the resource of the nature, making the best use of them at present and saving a certain amount of it for the use in the future. Thus, it discusses resources in the nature and their conservation as well. This aspect has been deeply considered in Buddhism. It does not approve destruction of natural resources for the purpose of economic development.

We have mentioned the macro-economic principles here only briefly, for the purpose of comparing them with the principles of Buddhist economic philosophy. Under the Buddhist system along with the economic development, ethical development as well as this worldly and supra-mundane development a person obtains is given priority. Therefore, we must give serious consideration to the question whether a miraculous development could be achieved through the current economic principles planned according to the macro-economic principles. According to Buddhist teaching, economic power as well noble humane concepts only can create a miraculous path for development.

Getting rid of craving for sense pleasures (*nissaraṇa*) and Consumption

Here production and consumption are given priority. The '*Rāsiya-sutta*' in the *Samyutta-nikāya* presents four points on which a person could be appreciated:

1. Production - earning wealth through non-violent means
2. Consumption - self satisfaction and happiness
3. Distribution - distribution of wealth and performing meritorious deeds

4. Getting rid of craving for sense pleasures (*nissaraṇa*) and Consumption - Not clinging on to wealth, not embracing it and not being bewitched by it and realizing its consequences, consuming wealth with the intention of '*nekkhamma*'.⁸

Getting rid of craving for sense pleasures (*nissaraṇa*) and consumption has been considered in the Buddhist economic system as the path to Nirvana. In the recent past, during the economic recession in the US, several well-known businesspersons were reported to have committed suicide. The Buddhist '*nissaraṇa*' economy will help avoid such tragic situations. Buddhism teaches stability –fortitude- in the face of '*aṭṭha lokadhammā*'-eight laws of nature- as the characteristics of a noble person. Therefore, '*lābha*' (profit) and '*alābha*' (loss) are mere economic concepts and not to be taken as part of one's life. Buddhism has displayed this well.

In developing a country, spiritual concepts too should be considered in relation to economics. According to that, through a pattern of economics based on corrupt attitudes, a healthy economy cannot be attained. Current principles too should be formed on the basis of such criteria.

- Buddhist Attitudes on Personal Economy

The economic process of a country does not just concern the ruling classes. People are also a major factor in the economic process in a country. They are responsible of the management. The process of earning money depends mainly on the people. According to that, the economic process of a country can be divided into two:

1. Public economy (Diplomatic)
2. Personal Economy

Human family is the primary social unit. Accordingly, if it is possible to build a strong economy in the families that will help to develop a strong economy in the country. In the macro-economic system, for assessing the economic conditions of a country, per capita income becomes the most important factor. In Buddhist philosophy, too a great deal of information on the institution of family and financial management can be found. That proves that even within Buddhism those theories have been practiced. However, in Buddhism, success of economy depends on liberation (*vimutti*).

According to the *Andhūpama-sutta* in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, there are three kinds of person: The blind, one eyed, and the two eyed. The blind person is not getting anything good done for this world as well as for the next. He has no financial development or actions enhancing merit. The One eyed, or the person with one eye, is the one who cares only for the development in this world. He does not claim for any spiritual development. The two eyed person works for his development in this life as well as for accruing merit for the next life. That kind of person has been praised as the noble person.⁹

Buddhism teaches internal and external factors that help to realize this economic success. These features are referred to by the following terms: ‘*dakkho*’(clever), ‘*analaso*’ (energetic), ‘*tatra uapāya vimamsāya samannāgato*’ (capable of investigating strategies), ‘*alaṃkātuṃ*’ (suitable for doing) and ‘*alaṃ samvidhātuṃ*’ (capable of organizing).¹⁰ There are two stages in accomplishing worldly prosperity: The qualities an entrepreneur should possess for increasing his wealth,

1. Earning wealth that has not been earned
2. Increasing the wealth already earned¹¹

All this must be done without violating the limits of righteousness. The *Dutiya-pāpanika-sutta*’ contains the characteristics of a prudent businessman. This discourse in the *Tika-nipāta* in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* discusses characteristics of a businessman who wishes to increase his income.

1. *Cakkhumā*- must be wise
2. *Vidhuro*- intelligent and energetic
3. *Nissaya sampanno*- Capable of building trustworthiness¹²

In the ‘*Paṭhama-pāpanika-sutta*’, proper organization has been shown as another factor for development. This *sutta* explains that one should contemplate well over his business in the morning, at noon as well as in the evening.¹³ There is reference to causes of loss of wealth in discourses like the *Siṅgālovāda-sutta*. The *Kula-sutta* in the *Samyutta-nikāya* discusses eight points that lead to the ruin of wealth in one’s family.¹⁴ In addition to these, a number of factors causing personal success in economic matters have been discussed in Buddhist philosophy. Prof. K.N. Jayatilleke has quoted a number of references from Buddhist literature that are concerned

with personal development in his work ‘Buddhism and Race Question’. Among them, loving kindness, non-hatred, company of good friends, virtuousness, supporting the state, having sufficient power and sound principles are the major ones.

A great deal of information is found within the Buddhist philosophy related to this subject. Most of such information are regarding matters related to personal economic development. It is not wrong to consider that personal prosperity will effect the economy of a country. When people are poor, the state also becomes poor. In an economy like that, a better future cannot be expected. Nevertheless, achieving physical as well as ethical progress and obtaining basic needs of a country through economic development can be accomplished through Buddhist teachings. As the Buddhist economic philosophy is not aimed at vulgar goals, and attainment of liberation is its final goal, it is not unreasonable to say that making Sri Lanka a country developed both physically and spiritually is possible. But we have to remember that the result of all these teachings should be achieved through practice.

¹ “*Cattārimāni, gahapati, sukhāni adhigamanīyāni gihinā kāmabhoginā kālena kālaṃ samayena samayaṃ upādāya. Katamāni cattāri? Atthisukhaṃ, bhogasukhaṃ, ānaṇyasukhaṃ anavajjasukhaṃ.*”

A.N. II (PTS), 96 p.

² “*...ye bhoto rañño janapade ussahanti kasigorakkhe, tesam bhavaṃ rājā bījabhattaṃ anuppadetu. Ye bhoto rañño janapade ussahanti vāñijjāya, tesam bhavaṃ rājā pābhataṃ anuppadetu. Ye bhoto rañño janapade ussahanti rājaporise, tesam bhavaṃ rājā bhattavetaṃ pakappetu...*”

D.N. I (PTS), 135 p.

³ “*...adhanānaṃ dhane ananupadiyamāne dāliddiyaṃ vepullamagamāsi, dāliddiye vepullaṃ gate adinnādānaṃ vepullamagamāsi, adinnādāne vepullaṃ gate satthaṃ vepullamagamāsi, satthe vepullaṃ gate pāṇātipāto vepullamagamāsi, pāṇātipāte vepullaṃ gate tesam sattānaṃ āyupi parihāyi, vaṇṇopi parihāyi...*”

D.N. III (PTS), 68 p.

⁴ “*Dāliddiyaṃ, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ lokasmiṃ kāmabhogino’ti? ‘Evaṃ, bhante’.* “*Yampi, bhikkhave, daliddo assako anāḷhiko iṇaṃ ādiyati, iṇādānampi, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ lokasmiṃ kāmabhogino’ti? ...*”

A.N. III (PTS), 351p.

⁵ “*...Naṭṭhaṃ na gavesanti, jiṇṇaṃ na paṭisaṅkharonti, aparimitapānabhōjanā honti, dussīlaṃ itthiṃ vā purisaṃ vā ādhipacce ṭhapenti...*”

A.N. II (PTS), 249p.

⁶ “*Bhoge saṃharamānassa, bhamarasseva irīyato; Bhogā sannicayaṃ yanti, vammikovupacīyati.*”

D.N. III (PTS), 188 p.

⁷ “*Evaṃ bhoge samāhatvā , alamatto kule gihī; Catudhā vibhaje bhoge, sa ve mittāni ganthati.*

Ekena bhoge bhuñjeyya, dvīhi kammaṃ payojaye; Catutthañca nidhāpeyya, āpadāsu bhavissatī’”

Ibid,

⁸ “*...ekacco kāmabhogī dhammena bhoge pariyesati asāhasena. Dhammena bhoge pariyesitvā asāhasena attānaṃ sukheti pīneti saṃvibhajati puññāni karoti. Te ca bhoge agadhito amucchito anajjhopanno ādīnavadassāvī nissaraṇapañño paribhuñjati.*”

A.N. IV (PTS), 332p.

⁹ “*Dvicakkhu pana akkhāto, seṭṭho purisapuggalo;*

Dhammaladdhehi bhogehi, utṭhānādhigataṃ dhanam.

Dadāti seṭṭhasaṅkappo, abyaggamānaso naro;

Upeti bhaddakaṃ ṭhānaṃ, yattha gantvā na socati.

Andhañca ekacakkhuñca, ārakā parivajjaye;

Dvicakkhuṃ pana sevetha, seṭṭham purisapuggalam’”

A.N. I (PTS), 129p.

¹⁰ “*...tattha dakkho hoti analaso, tatrūpāyāya vīmaṃsāya samannāgato alaṃ kātuṃ alaṃ saṃvidhātuṃ...*”

A.N. II (PTS), 35p.

¹¹ “*... anadhigataṃ vā bhogaṃ adhigantaṃ, adhigataṃ vā bhogaṃ phātiṃ kātuṃ...*”

A.N. I (PTS), 115p.

¹² “*Tīhi, bhikkhave, aṅgehi samannāgato pāpaṇiko nacirasseva mahattaṃ vepullattaṃ pāpuṇāti bhogesu. Katamehi tīhi? Idha, bhikkhave, pāpaṇiko cakkhumā ca hoti vidhuro ca nissayasampanno ca...*”

A.N. I (PTS), 116p.

¹³ “*Tīhi, bhikkhave, aṅgehi samannāgato pāpaṇiko abhabbo anadhigataṃ vā bhogaṃ adhigantaṃ, adhigataṃ vā bhogaṃ phātiṃ kātuṃ. Katamehi tīhi? Idha, bhikkhave, pāpaṇiko pubbaṅhasamayaṃ na sakkaccaṃ kammantaṃ adhiṭṭhāti, majjhanhikasamayaṃ na sakkaccaṃ kammantaṃ adhiṭṭhāti, sāyanhasamayaṃ na sakkaccaṃ kammantaṃ adhiṭṭhāti. Imehi kho, bhikkhave, tīhi aṅgehi samannāgato pāpaṇiko abhabbo anadhigataṃ vā bhogaṃ adhigantaṃ, adhigataṃ vā bhogaṃ phātiṃ kātuṃ.*”

A.N. I (PTS), 115p.

¹⁴ “*...Aṭṭha kho, gāmaṇi, hetū, aṭṭha paccayā kulānaṃ upaghātāya. Rājato vā kulāni upaghātaṃ gacchanti, corato vā kulāni upaghātaṃ gacchanti, aggito vā kulāni upaghātaṃ gacchanti, udakato vā kulāni upaghātaṃ gacchanti, nihitaṃ vā ṭhānā vigacchati duppayuttā vā kammantā vipajjanti, kule vā kulāṅgāroti uppajjati, yo te bhoge vikirati vidhamati viddhamseti, aniccatāye aṭṭhamīti...*”

S.N. IV (PTS), 400p.