

HEALING CONSUMERISM THROUGH BUDDHISM: A STUDY OF THE BUDDHIST APPROACH TO RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SRI LANKA

by Thilini Nilanka Weerasooriya*

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the solutions suggested in Buddhism for the contemporary issue of consumerism which can negatively affect sustainable development in Sri Lanka on contrary to the popular belief. As a religion that promotes a simpler, benevolent life and the main goal being attaining Nibbana, the world tends to view Buddhism as a doctrine that focuses more on afterlife than current lay life. Yet, on the contrary I contend that not only through sutras such as Vyaggapajja sutta that focuses on the importance of managing daily affairs by lay people, in majority of sutras preached by the Supreme Buddha to laymen emphasizes on economization. I argue that it also can defeat toxic consumerism to achieve sustainable development. For this purpose, Buddhist teachings need to spring to life rather than dwelling in books by being referred and put to action mainly in the Sri Lankan Buddhist society.

The paper discusses how sustainable development can also be redefined to go beyond materialistic development, which is one of the main focuses in Buddhism, inner peace. I argue that secular development

*. Lecturer, Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka.

is not rejected in Buddhism and that the Supreme Buddha encouraged lay people to acquire success both spiritually and materialistically but in a way that it does not basically violate the five precepts. The study explores Buddhist teachings in curing consumerism through mindful living mainly as preached in suttas such as Parabhawa sutta, Vyaggapajja sutta, Singalowada sutta, Sapthabhariya sutta and Mangala sutta. The discussion also extends with ample examples from the Buddhist concepts.

By integrating the Dhamma, the study endeavours to bring out Buddhist solutions for the rapidly capitalized Sri Lankan society to be healed from harmful consumerism in order to attain sustainable development. Thus, I argue that Buddhism not only promotes spiritual development but economical and social development which leads to a peaceful society as well.

1. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is no stranger to the world as a teaching that is unique among many other religions in the world. The Noble Dhamma advices the Supreme Buddha's disciples on many terrains in life from being good and happy during day-today activities to afterlife, until attaining enlightenment. However, contrary to the all rounding quality in Buddhism, it is generally viewed as a religion that focuses more on life after death than the present material world. It can be stated that this general notion carries little truth since Buddhism is a teaching that gives advices not only on making afterlife a happy one but also on making the current life successful, materially and spiritually.

Sri Lanka is a country which is renowned around the globe as a land that reveres Theravada Buddhism since over 2500 years. It can be unarguably believed that Theravada Buddhism changed course of the country to the better after it was endowed to our island by King Dharmashoka from India through his son Arahat Mahinda, who is venerated as the second Buddha in Sri Lanka. However, as other countries, Sri Lanka also faced different social, political and economic changes through time and tide and she has not succeeded in saving from getting devoured from consumerism. When connecting Buddhism, consumerism and Sri Lanka, it is important to explore the meaning of the complex idea. Oxford dictionary

defines consumerism as the preoccupation of society with the acquisition of consumer goods and Merriam Webster defines the word as the theory that an increasing consumption of goods¹ is economically desirable, a preoccupation with and an inclination toward the buying of consumer goods and the promotion of the consumer's interests². Sivaraksa (2003) defines consumerism as "the religion of consumption-attributing ultimate meaning to purchasing power" (Sivaraksa, 2003: 287)³ While consumerism is referred by some scholars such as Jean Baudrillard and Danielle Todd as "late capitalism", Simon Malpas (2005) explains it as:

"The circulation, purchase, sale, appropriation of differentiated goods and signs/objects today constitute our language, our code, the code by which the entire society communicates and converses. Such is the structure of consumption, its language, by comparison with which individual needs and pleasures are merely speech effects" (Malpas, 2005: 122)⁴.

Thus, consumerism is referred as the consumer culture and also the harmful impact of getting addicted to accumulating too much goods due to the influence of capitalism. The paper evidently refers to the latter. According to Stephanie Kaza, (2000) "consumerism is on a collision course with the limits of the planet, and the disease is spreading rapidly." (Kaza, 2000)⁵ The world has changed to the better and worse ever since man came to existence on earth and money or wealth has been a pivotal part in people's lives making and breaking them. However, as humans evolve, the focus has always been on making life more comfortable and likewise paving way to innovation of different machines and goods to make life easier but complex. In this paper, following the qualitative approach, several suttas and verses of the Dhammapada will be studied to study what

1. Oxford Dictionaries. "Consumerism" 15th January 2019

<<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/consumerism>>

2. Merriam Webster "Consumerism" 15th January 2019 <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consumerism>>

3. Sivaraksha, S. (2003) Edited by Gottfried, R. *Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom* "Alternatives to Consumerism" Amazon.com. Rowman & Littlefield

4. Malpas, S. (2005) *The Postmodern*. New York: Routledge.

5. Kaza, S. (2000) "Overcoming the Grip of Consumerism". *Buddhist-Christian Studies*. Vol 20. University of Hawaii Press.

the Supreme Buddha preached on the terrain. I emphasize the fact that the Noble One not only advised the lay disciples on mindful living, free from over-accumulating goods and wealth, in famous suttas that focused on the above topic, but also in many other places in the teachings of the Enlightened One.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research include studying whether the several specific suttas that are generally defined as the Buddhist teachings on conducting a happy lay life in par with the changing world are the only Buddhist suttas that teach the disciples to do so. The paper also analyzes the meanings of the several Buddhist suttas and the verses of the Dhammapada in which the Supreme Buddha has taught the disciples to live mindfully while enjoying the bliss of lay life.

3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Buddhism is generally viewed in the world as a ‘religion’ that encourages the followers to make their afterlife comfortable more than the current life. This idea might have derived from the Hindu practices that prevailed during the time of the Gauthama Buddha. The research attempts to explore the falsehood of this general notion. In order to delineate an in-depth and meaningful investigation, the research explores the Buddhist stance on consumerism through a study of the suttas, the Dhamma preaching of the Tathagatha. The questions explored are whether Buddhism rejects consumerism and what are the remedies the Supreme Buddha suggested the lay disciples if consumerism is denounced.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars around the world have explored Buddhism, consumerism and the connection between them. Sauwalak Kittiprapas (2015) in his article “Buddhist Approach and Happiness for Sustainable Development” states quoting Payutto (1992).

“Buddhism considers poverty is suffering and obstacle for higher development. As noted in Payutto (Payutto, 1992: 4)⁶ once Buddha said “when people are overwhelmed, and in pain through suffering, they are

6. Payutto, P. (1992) *Buddhist Economics*. 2nd ed. Buddhist University Press

incapable of understanding Dhamma” and stressed that “hunger is the most sever of all illnesses and that conditioned phenomena provide the basis for the most ingrain suffering”. (Kittiprapas quotes Payutto, 2015)⁷

According to Kittiprapas and Payutto, Buddhism realizes the importance of basic physical needs, and eradication of poverty is ‘the priority’ before human beings can be developed spiritually. Hence, it is clear that Buddhist economics does not object physical well-being and economic development as they are means towards higher life goal of happiness form liberalization. However, it can be argued that Buddhism does not believe in complete eradication of poverty as a possibility since it is a consequence of the *kamma*. Yet, Buddhism through time and tide has shown that being or not being economically prosperous is not an obstacle to being a good Buddhist as from beggars, lower caste people to princes and kings have found solace in Buddhism. In *Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom*, Sivarksa (2003) quotes David Arnott.

“By participating in the sacrament of purchase, by sacrificing money, you can buy an object that is not so much an object as a focus of images which grants you a place in the system of images you hold sacred. For a while when you buy a car, you also buy the power, prestige, sexuality and success which the advertisements have succeeded with the car, whatever the commodity is. Consumerism works by identifying the sense of unsatisfactoriness or lack (dukkha) we hold at a deep level of mind.... and then [by corporations] producing an object guaranteed to satisfy that “need”. (Sivarksa quotes David Arnott, 2003).⁸

According to Arnott, companies cater to the buyers by identifying their *dukkha* and producing to quench their wants. Kaza (2000) in “Overcoming the Grip of Consumerism” states,

“Several Buddhist teachers in the U.S. have taken up particular

7. Kittiprapas, S. (2015) “Buddhist Approach and Happiness for Sustainable Development” The Journal of International Buddhist Studies College (JIBSC). Vol.1, No.1. 2015 (p.107-145)

8. Sivaraksha, S. (2003) Edited by Gottfried, R. *Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom* “Alternatives to Consumerism” Amazon.com. Rowman & Littlefield.

sub-themes addressing over-consumption. Philip Kapleau has sounded an ethical call for vegetarianism based on the first precept, “no killing” (1982). Robert Aitken has taken a stand for reducing wants and needs to simplify the material life of the Western student (1994). Thich Nhat Hanh is very firm on the fifth precept, “no abuse of delusion-producing substances,” including exposure to junk television, advertisements, magazines and candy (1993). As for Buddhist and analysis of consumption, the field of literature is very small. Rita Gross has written provocative articles developing Buddhist positions on population, consumption and environment. (1997a, 1997b). From Thailand, Sulak Sivaraksa has campaigned tirelessly for economic development linked to spiritual development based in Buddhist principles of compassion and skillful means (1992) (Kaza, 2000: 24).⁹

Kaza, has quoted scholars such as Kapleau, Aitken. Thich Nhat Hanh, Gross and Sivaraksa and she has accumulated the literature on the connections between Buddhism and consumerism. In addition, exploring the teachings of the original teacher the Tathagatha is much important. Thus, the research has been aided with the quotes of the Dhammapada and valuable suttas such as Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, Mangala Sutta, Parabhava Sutta, Aputtaka Sutta, Anana Sutta, Vyaggapajja Sutta, Sigalovada Sutta, Karaniya Metta Sutta as well.

5. METHODOLOGY

The research followed the qualitative method in collecting data and studying the Dhamma preached by the Supreme Tathagatha Buddha. The most cited Buddhist principals are none other than the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path explained in the suttas, Dhammapada stanzas and other Buddhist concepts. The Pali Text Society database was mainly used in referring to the Buddhist suttas and Dhammapada stanzas translated and explained in Pali. The study explored Buddhist teachings in curing consumerism through mindful living mainly as preached in suttas such as Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, Parabhava Sutta, Vyaggapajja Sutta, Aputtaka Sutta, Anana Sutta, Singalovada Sutta, Karaniya Metta

9. Kaza, S. (2000) “Overcoming the Grip of Consumerism”. Buddhist-Christian Studies. Vol 20. University of Hawaii Press.

Sutta and Mangala Sutta. The discussion also extended with ample examples from the Buddhist concepts. Journals, books and book chapters were pursued to extend the sources used in the analysis. Jstor digital library and Google Scholar search engine were mainly employed to locate scholarly books, book chapters and journals. The scholarly books, book chapters and journals identified one or several Buddhist principals. Thus, the study was done.

6. ANALYSIS

It would not be wrong to argue that the very base of Theravada Buddhism itself is refraining from succumbing to worldly luxuries in order to get closer to attain the supreme bliss of Nibbana or the Enlightenment.

Monks, these two extremes ought not to be practiced by one who has gone forth from the household life. There is addiction to indulgence of sense-pleasures, which is low, coarse, the way of ordinary people, unworthy, and unprofitable; and there is addiction to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy, and unprofitable.

Avoiding both these extremes, the Tathagata (The Perfect One) mhas realized the Middle Path; it gives vision, gives knowledge, and leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment and to Nibbana. And what is that Middle Path realized by the Tathagata? It is the Noble Eightfold path, and nothing else, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. This is the Middle Path realized by the Tathagata which gives vision, which gives knowledge, and leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment, and to Nibbana.¹⁰

As preached by the Enlightened One in his very first sutra, Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, the Lord Buddha rejected *kamasukhallikanu yoga*, (self-indulgence) or the state of consuming luxuries and falling deeper into consumerism by chasing lavishes. The Noble One also renounced *attakilamathanu yoga* (self-mortification) or allowing oneself to suffer. Likewise, by advising his disciples to follow the *Majjimapatipada* or the Middle

10. Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (SN 56.11 PTS: S v 420 CDB ii 1843.

Path, it can be stated that the Tathagatha rejected yielding to consumerism.

The Supreme Buddha also preached the disciples to follow at least the five precepts, which include abstaining from harming living things, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicating substances. These rules are also mentioned in the Dhammapada,

*“Yo panamatipateti – musavadanca bhasati
loke adinnamadiyati – paradaranca gacchati.
Surameray pananca – yo naro anuyunjati
idhevameso lokasmim - mulam khanatiattano.”*¹¹

The holy words of the Enlightened One convey “He who destroys life, tells lies, takes what is not given him, commits adultery and takes intoxicating drinks, digs up his own roots even in this very life.” If studied analytically, these basic rules themselves promote abstaining from getting trapped to consumerism as also highlighted in the second, third and fifth precepts, since the words emphasize righteous and simple living.

Another very important teaching in Buddhism is the practice of giving or ‘dana’. Many religions around the world do mention this as a meritorious concept, so that the practice of giving is not an isolated deed defined in Buddhism. ‘Dana’ is one of the three most important steps in marching towards eliminating the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion, with three factors being dana, sila (virtuous conduct) and bavana (meditation), as mentioned in Punnakiriyavatthu Sutta of Anguttara Nikaya, Attakatha, Danawaggo. ‘Dana’ is also highlighted in Mangala Sutta, as

*“dananca dhammacariyaca – gnathakananca sangaho,
Anavajjani kammani – etham mangala muttamam”*¹²

Which carry the meaning that the acts of giving, righteous living according to Dhamma and helping your relatives are truly auspicious and good omens. According to the American Buddhist scholar Bikku Bodhi.

11. Malavagga of the Dhammapada (Dhp XVIII PTS: Dhp 246-247).

12. Mangala Sutta, (SN 2.4 PTS: SN 258-269).

Practice of giving does not by its own nature conduce directly and immediately to the arising of insight and the realization of the Four Noble Truths. Giving functions in the Buddhist discipline in a different capacity. It does not come at the apex of the path, as a factor constituent of the process of awakening, but rather it serves as a basis and preparation which underlies and quietly supports the entire endeavor to free the mind from the defilements.¹³

Thus, it can be stated that the practice of giving in Buddhism is not only a fancy idea which merely promotes giving by inciting the followers to expect more comfort in the afterlife, but a practice that is expected to free them from worldly goods and thereby free the mind, while acquiring merits by helping others.

Parabhava Sutta of Khuddaka Nikaya, Sutta nipatapali, Uragavaggo, is the Discourse on Downfall which was preached by the Gautama Buddha about the twelve facts which cause the downfall of people. It can be stated that the sixth, eleventh and the twelfth causes of downfall as preached by the Enlightened One can be highlighted for the study.

“Pahutavitto purso, sahiranno sabojano:

Eko bujjati saduni, than parabavato mukhan”

The meaning of this stanza is “the person who is possessed of much wealth, who has gold, and who has an abundance of food, but enjoys his delicacies all by himself, this is the cause of his downfall.”¹⁴

“Ittin sondin vikiranam, purisam vapi tadisam:

Issariyasmim tapeti, than parabavato mukhan”

The eleventh stanza carries the meaning as he who places in authority a woman given to drink and squandering, or a man of similar nature, this is the cause of his downfall.¹⁵

“Appabhogo mahathanho, khattiye jayate kule

So ca rajjan pattayati, than parabhavato mukhan”

13. “Dana: The Practice of Giving”, selected essays edited by Bhikku Bodhi. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 30 November 2013, <<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/various/wheel367.html#intro>>

14. Parabhava Sutta (SN 1.6 PTS: SN 91-115).

15. Parabhava Sutta (SN 1.6 PTS: SN 91-115).

The eleventh stanza carries the meaning as he who has little possessions but great ambition (greed), is of warrior birth and aspires selfishly to (an unattainable) sovereignty, this is the cause of his downfall.¹⁶

When exploring the above stanzas it is clear that the Perfect One renounced greed and over-accumulation of goods. The sixth stanza itself discourages the disciples to have an 'abundance' of goods, food and selfishly consume them all by him/herself without any generous thoughts. It can be stated that the eleventh verse particularly focuses on consumerism as it specifies greed as the sumptuously spending money on food (meat and fish) and intoxicants by him/herself or giving the authority to one such extravagant man or woman to manage his/her resources will cause the downfall of the specific person. The twelfth stanza also emphasizes how one should not be greedy towards what he/she does not have, such as the access to money, social status or goods.

In Aputtaka Sutta of the Samyutta Nikaya, a dialog that happened between the Supreme Buddha and the King Pasenadi Kosala is revealed. The King explains how he is on his way after conveying to state a late money-lending householder's heirless fortune to the royal palace. The Noble One stated that it is the way when a person of no integrity acquires lavish wealth, he lets his wealth go to waste and not to any good use. The Noble One also advised the king how to put the wealth properly to use.

When a person of integrity acquires lavish wealth, he provides for his own pleasure & satisfaction, for the pleasure & satisfaction of his parents, the pleasure & satisfaction of his wife & children; the pleasure & satisfaction of his slaves, servants, & assistants; and the pleasure & satisfaction of his friends. He institutes for Brahmans & contemplatives offerings of supreme aim, heavenly, resulting in happiness, leading to heaven. When his wealth is properly put to use, kings don't make off with it, thieves don't make off with it, fire doesn't burn it, water doesn't sweep it away, and hateful heirs don't make off with it. Thus his wealth, properly put to use, goes to a good use and not to waste.¹⁷

16. Parabhava Sutta(SN 1.6 PTS: SN 91-115).

17. Aputtaka Sutta(SN 3.19 PTS: S i 89CDB 182).

Thus, according to the Supreme Buddha, spending the wealth “properly” does not mean squandering it. He advised the disciples to serve the family, friends, the employers and the sangha, or one will end up losing all his wealth. This is also highlighted in *Adiya Sutta*, where the Enlightened One advised Anathapindika the householder about the five benefits that can be obtained from wealth. At another occasion as mentioned in *Anana Sutta* of *Anguttara Nikaya*, when inquired by the Chief Lay Disciple of the Gautama Buddha *sasana* of the types of bliss that can be attained in the proper season, the Perfect One answered ‘debtlessness’ as the third of four types of perfect happiness.

And what is the bliss of debtlessness? There is the case where the son of a good family owes no debt, great or small, to anyone at all. When he thinks, ‘I owe no debt, great or small, to anyone at all,’ he experiences bliss, he experiences joy. This is called the bliss of debtlessness.¹⁸

Thus it can be stated that as a great economist, the Blessed One advised the disciples who were bankers, farmers, businessmen and kings to do better at their profession. It can be explored with the stance on Buddhism on debt. The disciples are advised by the Supreme Buddha not to borrow debts from others as much as possible and he names ‘debtlessness’ as one of the four major types of happiness. This is because when borrowed money, it can lead to more shortage of money later on with the interests and it will likely be a burden on the person and the family as well. When looking at today’s Sri Lankans, this can be identified as a fact that is not much paid heed to. For instance, majority of Sri Lankans, just as people of other countries have fallen to mounts of debts in order to buy vehicles, build a house and most importantly to do online shopping. Online shopping can be considered as one of the mini beasts conducted by metaphorically harmful devices such as credit cards, which are literally debt-mountains with a flashy outward appearance. Such tempting methods have made people of the contemporary world slaves to consumerism and Sri Lankans although blessed with Buddhism endowed over 2500 years ago have not been able to survive it with being devoured by capitalism.

18. *Anana Sutta* (AN 4.62 A ii 69).

Vyaggapajja Sutta is one celebrated sutta in Buddhism which is famous for concerning the lay life. There, Dighajanu, a Koliyan goes to the Blessed One and poses a question many of the lay Buddhists still may ask a Buddhist reverend:

“We are lay people enjoying sensuality; living crowded with spouses & children; using Kasi fabrics & sandalwood; wearing garlands, scents, & creams; handling gold & silver. May the Blessed One teach the Dhamma for those like us, for our happiness & well-being in this life, for our happiness & well-being in lives to come.”¹⁹

At this occasion, the Supreme Buddha kindly answered the question with much concern. He stated that there are four qualities, that lead to a lay person’s happiness and well-being in this life, which are being consummate in initiative, being consummate in vigilance, admirable friendship, and maintaining one’s livelihood in tune. It was also preached that there are these four qualities that lead to a lay person’s happiness and well-being in lives to come, which are being consummate in conviction, being consummate in virtue, being consummate in generosity, being consummate in discernment.

And what does it mean to maintain one’s livelihood in tune? There is the case where a lay person, knowing the income and outflow of his wealth, maintains a livelihood in tune, neither a spendthrift nor a penny-pincher. ‘Thus will my income exceed my outflow, and my outflow will not exceed my income.’ Just as when a weigher or his apprentice, when holding the scales, knows, ‘It has tipped down so much or has tipped up so much,’ in the same way, the lay person, knowing the income and outflow of his wealth, maintains a livelihood in tune, neither a spendthrift nor a penny-pincher, ‘Thus will my income exceed my outflow, and my outflow will not exceed my income.’ If a lay person has a small income but maintains a grand livelihood, it will be rumored of him, ‘This clansman devours his wealth like a fruit-tree eater. If a lay person has a large income but maintains a miserable livelihood, it will be rumored of him, ‘This clansman will die of starvation.’ But when a lay person, knowing the income and outflow of his wealth, maintains a livelihood in tune, neither a spendthrift nor a penny-pincher, ‘Thus will my income

19. Vyaggapajja Sutta (AN 8.54 PTS: A iv 281).

exceed my outflow, and my outflow will not exceed my income,' this is called maintaining one's livelihood in tune.²⁰

The holy words of the Tathagatha clearly reveal that he most definitely denounced falling to the dark pit of consumerism. As mentioned in many places in Buddhist teaching, the Perfect One thus condemned miserliness and extravagance. His advice is to balance the income cleverly that how much money you earn, do not spend over the amount you cannot afford, 'maintain the livelihood in tune'.

This idea of maintaining the income is also mentioned in Sigalovada Sutta. The setting is Rajagaha and the Blessed One advises a young householder named Sigalaka who arose early and set out from Rajagaha with freshly washed clothes and hair with palms together held up in reverence, he was paying respect towards the six directions. Among many advises, the Tathagatha stated so,

"What six ways of squandering wealth are to be avoided? Young man, heedlessness caused by intoxication, roaming the streets at inappropriate times, habitual partying, compulsive gambling, bad companionship, and laziness are the six ways of squandering wealth".²¹

As mentioned by Gautama Buddha, the great teacher, intoxication, roaming the streets at inappropriate times, habitual partying and compulsive gambling are the modes of wasting money still in the modern world and are elements of consumerism which were emphasized by the Tathagatha as should be avoided for a better living.

In addition, it can be stated that in sutras such as Saptabhariya Sutta and Karaniya Metta Sutta also contain teachings that promote avoiding consumerism as well. In Saptabhariya Sutta which explains the types of wives highlight that it is the duty of a good wife to protect the wealth her husband possesses. Also, as mentioned in Sigalovada Sutta, the husband must provide her with enough clothing, jewelry and look into her needs and wants, thus providing her enough to keep her happy. This reveals that being a good lay

20. Vyaggapajja Sutta (AN 8.54 PTS: A iv 281).

21. Sigalovada Sutta (DN 31 PTS: D iii 180).

Buddhist disciple does not mean that one must completely refrain from consuming worldly comforts on a daily basis. Anyhow, as mentioned in the Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta vibhanga, the Patimokkha rules, the Buddhist monks are advised not to come in contact with the vicious world, and get attracted to the worldly comforts, there is no restraint as such to the laymen and laywomen. Buddhist lay disciples are advised by the Enlightened One to follow the five precepts and also observe the 'uposatha' at least once a month in order to acquire merit and thereby not to be blinded by the luxuries which are attractions that can sever one away from the Dhamma. The meaning of the Pali lines "Kamesu vineiya gedham"²² is "being freed from sensual desires" and "Sallahukavutti"²³ is "simple in living" as mentioned in Karaniya Metta Sutta which ultimately lead to being free in the world with lesser attachments and be free from the world as well. Thus, it can be argued that, Buddhism does not promote consumerism and teaching is a philosophy that helps the follower to be healed from toxic consumerism.

7. CONCLUSION

Development and success is assessed by numbers and material things in the contemporary society. The consumer world is yet another place that promotes the ideology. It is an open secret that Sri Lanka, although is officially a Socialist Democratic Republic, is devoured by capitalism, leading the people to fall prey to consumerism, to over-consumption of goods, including unnecessary goods. Buddhism on the contrary, advocates a simpler life. Just as Kaza (2000) in "Overcoming the Grip of Consumerism", has provided four alternative arenas in constructing an alternative vision. They are, through education, active resistance, changing structural policies and building community and culture (Kaza, 2000)²⁴. Hence, consumerism can be healed with educating the society, mainly through Buddhist centres and temples, with active resistance by practicing meditation and resisting desire as taught in Buddhism, by changing policies such as by alternative methods

22. Karaniya Metta Sutta (SN 1.8 PTS: SN 143-152).

23. Karaniya Metta Sutta (SN 1.8 PTS: SN 143-152).

24. Kaza, S. (2000) "Overcoming the Grip of Consumerism". Buddhist-Christian Studies. Vol 20. University of Hawaii Press.

of punishments to wrong-doers in the society and by building community and culture such as by promoting non-alcoholism as preached in the Noble Dhamma.

With the basis of the Buddhist philosophy being the Four Noble truths and revering the Triple Gem, Buddhism advises the disciples to follow the Eightfold path. The Supreme Buddha can be unarguably considered as not only the world's greatest teacher, the world's best politician, the world's kindest human being, the world's best social worker but also the world's best economist. He gave advices to people to become happier people, bankers, businessmen to become better bankers and better businessmen, farmers to become better farmers and most importantly he gave advices to lay people to become Arahats. Although Anathapindika the householder and Visaka, the Chief Lay Disciples in Gautama Buddha sasana, were praised, the Supreme Buddha never advised us to be as excessively generous as them which might be burdensome. The Perfect One wanted us to be like Chitta the householder and Velukantaki Nanda matha who reached the state of *anagami* and attained the Nibbana, although they enjoyed lay life as general citizens in the society. Buddhism provides us many alternatives to lead a happier life as well as building the path to a blissful afterlife. Thus, it can be concluded that if followed correctly, the Buddhist Dhamma is a cure that can heal the suffering caused by consumerism and toxic consumerism itself, this unquenchable illness in the society in Sri Lanka and in the world.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Anana Sutta (AN 4.62 A ii 69)

Aputtaka Sutta (SN 3.19 PTS: S i 89CDB 182)

Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (SN 56.11 PTS: S v 420 CDB ii 1843)

Karaniya Metta Sutta (SN 1.8 PTS: SN 143-152)

Malavagga of the Dhammapada (Dhp XVIII PTS: Dhp 246-247)

Mangala Sutta (SN 2.4 PTS: SN 258-269)

Parabhava Sutta (SN 1.6 PTS: SN 91-115)

Sigalovada Sutta (DN 31 PTS: D iii 180)

Vyaggapajja Sutta (AN 8.54 PTS: A iv 281)

Secondary sources

Abeydeera, S. (2016) *Buddhism and Sustainability-Related Organisational Practises*. Doctoral thesis. Auckland University Press.

Barnhill, D.L. (2004) "Good Work: An Engaged Buddhist Response to the Dilemmas of Consumerism" *Buddhist-Christian Studies* .Vol. 24 (2004), pp. 55-63 (9 pages). University of Hawaii Press.

Bodhi, B. (1995) "Dana: The Practice of Giving, Selected Essays Edited by Bhikku Bodhi" The Buddhist Publication Society, 30 November 2013 <<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/various/wheel367.html#intro>>

Kaza, S. (2000) "Overcoming the Grip of Consumerism". *Buddhist-Christian Studies*. Vol 20. University of Hawaii Press.

Kittiprapas, S. (2015) "Buddhist Approach and Happiness for Sustainable Development" *The Journal of International Buddhist Studies College (JIBSC)*. Vol.1, No.1. 2015 (p.107-145)

Payutto, P. (1992) *Buddhist Economics*. 2nd ed. Buddhist University Press.

Sivaraksha, S. (2003) Edited by Gottfried, R. *Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom* "Alternatives to Consumerism" Amazon.com. Rowman & Littlefield.

