

# A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON OVERCONSUMPTION AND ITS NEGATIVE EFFECTS TOWARDS SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*In the light of modern advancement of science, technology, mass production of goods, consumerism emerged as a major trend and driving force of human behavior. It is based on the following two premises. First, the prosperity of mankind hinges on the subjugation of nature. Second, the well-being of human depends on an abundance of material goods. The first premise took its validity from Christianity based philosophy as God created the world and animals for mankind. Mankind is the master. Man is there to manipulate and control everything at his discretion even at the destruction of earth and whole other species. "And God created man to his own image; to the image of God he created him; male and female, he created them. And God blessed them, and he said, "Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the flying creatures of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." Genesis 1, 27-28<sup>1</sup>. It is obvious that this promotes lack of respect and less concern for other species and environment. The most recent addition to the environmental degradation is the climate change.*

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1. Holy Bible, Catholic Public Domain Version, 2009, p.2, website [online]. Available from [http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic/OT-01\\_Genesis.htm](http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic/OT-01_Genesis.htm) accessed 01/01/2019

*This article will attempt to discuss issues connected with overconsumption in the world and what Buddha has told the world about understanding it and resolving it as a human social problem.*

## 1. OVERCONSUMPTION

The overconsumption is defined as the action or fact of consuming something to an excess. It has been made a great issue in the arena of consumerist society. It has created social inequality, social injustice and social gap as some groups of people do not have access to proper consumption, let alone overconsumption. This term could cover a variety of things including excessive consumption of food, energy, electronic appliances, clothes, and cosmetics. Overconsumption has shown a negative impact on humanity, today.

The consumption is an indispensable part of life for survival. The Oxford dictionary<sup>2</sup> defines consumption as follows “The action of using up a resource, the action of eating or drinking something, an amount of something which is used up or ingested. The purchase of goods and services by the public”. As it is defined the usage of resources is a very important aspect of consumption. It is commonly accepted that in order to meet basic human needs for survival, humans consume resources in moderation.

It is important to examine how consumption is distributed among developed, advanced economies and undeveloped countries. A person born in Europe or North America will consume thirty times more of the earth resources and energies and also emit thirty times as much pollution compared to a person born in a developing country.<sup>3</sup> Another salient feature of developed countries is that the Americans are guilty of consuming the most resources per capita, as well as using the most inefficient technologies causing more environmental damages. The US population only accounts for about five percent of the world’s population and this five percentage tend to release almost quarter of global emissions. Presently, the average

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2. *Oxford Living Dictionaries* in 2010 3rd Ed Oxford University Press.

3. Comes from Paul Ehrlich research from “Too Many Rich People: Weighing Relative Burdens on the Planet.”

American uses 11 kilowatts of energy in a single year.<sup>4</sup>

We will examine the problem of energy now and how it pollutes the environment through over consumption. The industrialization created greatest energy hunger that was not experienced ever before in the human history. To power this insatiable hunger, new energy sources were discovered such as coal, fossil fuel, nuclear power. But very solution of creating new energies resulted in a number of unsolvable problems such as global warming, melting of ice due to global warming, industrial wastes, water pollution, and air pollution. Another new aspect appears to be the frequency pollution. This is caused by numerous communication systems. It is scientifically proven that micro waves are very harmful for women's reproductive system and could cause cancer. The electronic waves come from the modern communication equipment such as wireless routers, mobile phone signals, satellite and various types of signals. etc, The depletion of ozone layers in the sky, degradation of farming land due to insecticide and pesticide, desertification, draught in some part of the world, constant flooding are some noteworthy negative impacts. Sea pollution is another recent development through release of harmful chemical substances and over 1 trillion tons of plastic. The apparent loss of species has been identified as the result of sea pollution.

In certain parts of the world, overpopulation has added to human disasters for not having sufficient resources to address their needs.

### Human Psyche

We shall now turn towards the human psyche to understand how human beings respond to overconsumption. A well-know Buddhist sutra -Ratnapala Sutta in Majjima Nikaya describes how human psyche works. A very wealthy young man having heard Buddha's teachings left worldly life and became monk. When he was asked by the king of his homeland why he became a monk leaving all comforts in his secular life, he spelled out four factors. His first point was that 'the world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave

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4. Statistics obtained from the website [online]. Available from: [www.overpopulation.org](http://www.overpopulation.org). accessed 12/01/2018.

to craving’:<sup>5</sup> This factor appears to be true and extremely relevant even after 2600 years, today. All human beings in the world do not seem to be satisfied with what they receive. The majority of human beings in the world are looking for something new and something better something more exciting. The multinational corporations have taken the advantage of the weakness of the human psyche and human beings are bombarded with luring advertisements for acquiring new things which are not necessarily required for day-to-day living.

Another weakness in the human psyche is that we could very easily get addicted to pleasures that we have already experienced. We need the same happiness again and again or even more. The advertising industry takes the advantage of this weakness and get ready to sell more and more goods to people. This in turns increases demands, supply for the good and services more and more in the market. These demands create more unsustainable production of goods harming and destroying natural resources and environment. Those who benefit from consumerism, always highlights individualism. Multifaceted methods are used to promote individualism, self centeredness, selfishness and egoism. More customers live in isolation in the Western worlds and therefore, these new messages appeal to them tremendously.

### Buddha’s Teachings

This is where we could enter into a discussion of Buddha’s teachings as relevant to consumerism as well as to unsatisfied needs of human beings.

It is stated that people who are not far sighted tend to comprehend the world as a “one-life-only” existence. This kind of beliefs give opportunities for human beings to enjoy more and more as there is no post-mortem retribution. Buddha considered a person of this nature as a person with one eye.

All human beings feel that they are lacking something or that they

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5. Bhikkhu Nanamoli (Translator), Bhikkhu Bodhi (Translator) *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* 1995, 2015, Wisdom Publications, Massachusetts, USA Ratthapala Sutta 82 Sutta, p. 687 “Uno loko atitto tanhadaso”.

are missing something even though their basic needs are already met. It is again true that in this modern world. A person is valued based on what they have in their pockets, what type of house, and car they use. A person is valued based on his/her possession rather than on his/her personal qualities.

As Buddha expounded in the Dhamma, we need to understand the interconnectedness of everything in the world. Everything is based on causes and conditions. Therefore, we need to respect life. Having a caring attitude for all beings including the natural world is essential. As mentioned in Karaniya Metta Sutta<sup>6</sup> leading a very simple life style in harmony with nature and other creatures and learning to appreciate interconnectedness of all lives and nature become a matter of paramount importance. .

The very life of Buddha is a classic example of his own teachings. He had very simple life with very little possession. He was born under a tree in a very beautiful garden. He gained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Buddhagaya in India. He set the example by paying gratitude to the Bo Tree for the protection and shade provided to attain Buddhahood. Most of his life time was spent in the open air like forests, gardens, groves and caves. He was a great traveler who travelled thousands of miles by foot to propagate the Dhamma among the masses. In his final journey to Kusinara for final passing away of the Buddha addressed the monks as follows “Ananda Vesali is delightful, the Udena shrine is delightful, Gotamaka shrine is delightful, Stambaka shrine is delightful, Bahuputta shrine is delightful, Capala shrine is delightful”<sup>7</sup>

He was an admirer of nature in its true sense of beauty without any attachment to it. Most of his enlightened disciples also took the same stand “there are beautiful forests which do to attract ordinary men. The passionless Arahants are attracted by such forests, because they are not seekers of sensual pleasures”<sup>8</sup> In Maha Mangala Sutta

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6. Ven Parawahera Pannanada, Editor 1977, *Sutta Nipathaya Sri Lanka Government Press*, Colombo Karaniyametta Sutta, p. 44.

7. Walshe Maurice translator, *Long Discourse of the Buddha*. A translation of Diga Nikaya Wisdom Publication London, 1987, Mahaparinibbana Sutta 16, p. 252.

8. Ven. W Sarada Maha Thera 1993, Dhammapada, Taipei Taiwan, *The Corporate Body of Buddha Educational Foundation*, Verse 99, p210 Ramaniyanaranni.

he recommended to live in proper environments as a great blessing “Patirupadesavaso ca”.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF BUDDHISM THAT CAN BE USED TO UNDERSTAND OVERCONSUMPTION AND ITS EFFECTS TO ENVIRONMENT

The Buddhism teaches the doctrine of dependent origination. It is a doctrine based on cause and effect. The Buddha explains in Mahatanhasankaya Sutta that the Samsaric life (the cycle of birth and death) arises due to ignorance. How a being is formed due to many causes and conditions.

*“With formation as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as a condition, mentality-materiality; with mentality-materiality; as a condition, the six fold sense base; with the six fold sense base as a condition, contact; with contact as a condition, feeling; feeling with as a condition as a craving...,”*<sup>10</sup>

It is clear from the above quotation that ignorance is the prime cause for this existence. The same ignorance leads beings to pollute the environment and consumed overly. Craving is the second major cause for the pollution of the environment. The manufacturer of this century encourage the consumers by creating unnecessary wants.

An eminent Buddhist scholar Bhikku Bodhi presents the case very well. He pointed out that recent developments of the World Bank and IMF and the opening of markets to international trade and capital have been deleterious. He writes “the corporate economy is not only driven by its own inherent greed but it’s very success depend on arousing greed in others” emphasized by the advertising industry where “there is hardly a human weakness it hesitates to play upon to promote sales: sexual attractions and status, pride and cupidity, fear and worry, arrogance and vanity-all fair game in the drive to boost profits”.<sup>11</sup>

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9. Ven Parawahera Pannanada, Editor 1977, Sutta Nipathaya Sri Lanka Government Press, Colombo Mangala Sutta page 80.

10. Bhikkhu Nanamoli (Translator), Bhikkhu Bodhi (Translator) *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, 1995, 2015 Wisdom Publications, Massachusetts, USA Mahatanhasankaya Sutta page 353.

11. Bhikku Bodhi The Buddha’s message for the next century in Sunday Island News

The global power struggle is also an important factor. The world leaders constantly raise arms such as nuclear weapons, which are deadliest to human existence in this little planet and inventing more disastrous weapons and upgrading conventional weapons to more lethal spending incalculable amount of money and resources for these in vain effort.

The Buddha's teachings and values have entirely different set of manifestations. The Buddhist values emphasize simplicity instead of complexity, moderation instead of over indulgence generosity instead of greed, loving-kindness instead of hatred and peace instead of war. In *Karaniyametta Sutta*<sup>12</sup> It is stated in Pali, that a person who wishes to attain that state of calm (nibbana) he must be gentle (mudu) We must be gentle for the environment and things we use. Contended (santussako), ( enoughness), (Santrindiyo) controlled in senses (eye ear nose tongue touch and mind) because people try to satisfy these senses overly they fall into the consumerism trap. He should not do any slight wrongs that wise men will condemn. If a person has will power to follow these important qualities and principles he shall develop very healthy and sustainable consumer habits making himself environment friendly person.

Buddhism provides a wider basis on which man can sustain the environment and other creatures. Contentment is a major virtue in Buddhism. "Contentment is the greatest wealth".<sup>13</sup> When we explore this utterance from the Buddha there is very meaningful story which is relevant to our topic behind this verse. King Pasenadi in India was an over eater. He came to hear teachings of Buddha after eating and he was feeling uncomfortable. When Buddha inquired the reason, he revealed that he has been an overeater. Then the Buddha advised him "O king one ought to observe moderation in eating. For in moderate eating there is comfort." He instructed reduce food intake day by day until he reaches moderate level. The

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Paper Sri Lanka 10 May 1998.

12. Ven Parawahera Pannanada, Editor 1977, *Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka Series*, Sutta Nipathaya Sri Lanka Government Press, Colombo *Karaniyametta Sutta* page 44.

13. Ven. W Sarada Maha Thera 1993, *Treasury of Truth Illustrated Dhammapada*, Taipei Taiwan, The Corporate Body of Buddha Educational Foundation, Verse 204 p436 Arogya paramalabha Santutthi Param Dhanam... .."

king did as he was told and found that by eating less he became slimmer and felt better and enjoyed better health. “Mattannuta ca Bhattasmimpanthan ca sayanasanam” “Moderation in food, abode and intent on higher thoughts”<sup>14</sup> Buddha also emphasized the moderation (right dosage) food, shelter, clothing, in everything in general.

The Buddhist concept of recycling is found in story where Buddha’s attendant Ananda went to preach to Udena King’s 500 concubines in the palace. These women offered five hundred valuable clothes to Ananda. He accepted all of the five hundred clothes. Subsequently, king heard about this and was upset. Ananda there told the king the robes are stored in robes stores. When a monk needs a robe it is given. He will use and repair it for the maximum usage. When it is no longer possible to use, it will be used as an under robe. When it is no longer possible to use as an under robe, it is used as a bed sheet. When it is no longer possible to use as bed sheet, it is used as a doormat. When it is no longer possible to use as a doormat the clothe is used as cloth to hold hot pots in the kitchen. When it is no longer possible to use any more used to repair walls mix with mud.<sup>15</sup> Buddhist monks used discarded clothes in the cemetery and other places to make robes. This is very good example of concept of recycling.

The idea in Buddhism is to use the resources without wasting and throwing away. To have a self imposed limitation for one’s consumption appears to be a great solution for most of modern problems. Due to fast food and highly luxurious life styles, nearly one quarter of world population is facing obesity and related problems. Obesity also causes mental sickness due over thinking about appearance. Craving for big buildings and bigger houses and not using them will increase carbon foot print causing environmental damages. China alone has over 1.5 million second

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14. Ven. W Sarada Maha Thera 1993, *Treasury of Truth Illustrated Dhammapada*, Taipei Taiwan, The Corporate Body of Buddha Educational Foundation, Verse 185 p396 Anupavadoanupaghato Pathimokke ca Sanvaro Mattannutabhattasmimpanthan ca sayanasanam ... ..”

15. The Jataka, Vol. II, tr. by W.H.D. Rouse, [1895], at sacred-texts.com Guṇa-jātaka. website [online]. Available from: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j2/j2010.htm> accessed on 12/01/2019.

or third condominium houses bought as investment and never occupied people while many millions of living without houses.

According to a famous meditation master, Thich NhatHanh “much of our suffering comes from not eating mindfully... we need to look deeply at how we grow, gain, and consume our food, so we can eat in ways that preserve our collective well-being, minimize our suffering and the suffering of other species, and allow the earth to continue to be a source of life for all of us... while we eat, we destroy living beings and the environment”.<sup>16</sup>

The basic Buddhist code of conduct is five precepts. “Abandoning the taking life, he dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings”<sup>17</sup> The first precept is simply “I vow to refrain from taking life.”<sup>18</sup> According to master Nhat Hanh, who reformulated and recomposed the precept says that what is involved in the first precept is aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.<sup>19</sup>

The main theme of this precept is that life is valuable and should be protected. As Nhat Hanh comments further, “it [life] is everywhere, inside us and all around us; it has so many forms” and that “we humans are made entirely of non-human elements, such as plants, minerals, earth, clouds, and sunshine.”<sup>20</sup> The heart of this precept stems from the realization that living creatures are being killed all over the world all of the time.<sup>21</sup> From this realization, most

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16. Thich Nhat Hanh's, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy and Liberation: The Four Noble Truths, The Noble Eightfold Path, and Other Basic Buddhist Teachings* p. 32- 33.

17. Walshe Maurice translator, *Long Discourse of the Buddha*. A translation of Diga Nikaya Wisdom Publication London, 1987, Sammannapala sutta 2 page 99-100.

18. This translation is taken from *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture* ed. Heinz Bechert & Richard Gombrich p. 54.

19. Discussed in Thich Nhat Hanh's, *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts*, p. 42-56, 127-132.

20. *ibid.*

21. *ibid.*

people are naturally drawn “to cultivate compassion and use it as a source of energy for the protection of people, animals, plants, and even minerals.”<sup>22</sup> Nhat Hanh claims that this practice of cultivating compassion and protecting life includes the ecosystem because the destruction of the environment is linked to human destruction. He puts it, “protecting human life is not possible without also protecting the lives of animals, plants, and minerals.”<sup>23</sup> He concludes that anyone who adheres to this precept should be a protector of the environment because it entails the practice of protecting all lives, which includes the lives of our fellow human beings as well as other animals, plants, and minerals.<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, this precept warns against overpopulation, overconsumption and the resulting environmental degradation because none promotes the cultivation of compassion. The compassion of the first precept is not the only way people should respond to the world’s suffering. The second precept provides another way. Traditionally, the second precept is translated as “I vow to refrain from stealing.”<sup>25</sup> Nhat Hanh, though, reinterpreted the second precept as, *Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression, I vow to cultivate loving kindness and learn ways to work for the well being of people, animals, plants and minerals. I vow to practice generosity by sharing my time, energy and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.*<sup>26</sup> This precept is in many ways an extension of the first. As the first emphasized compassion, this precept emphasizes loving kindness,

Both of which are two ethical precepts that come out of the

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22. *ibid.*

23. Thich Nhat Hanh’s, *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts* p. 130- 132. 75 *Ibid* p. 42, 132.

24. *ibid.*

25. This classical translation is taken from *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture*, ed. Heinz Bechert & Richard Gombrich p. 54.

26. Thich Nhat Hanh’s, *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts*, p. 56.

historical Buddha's teachings on the features of love. Exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression are all causes of much suffering all over the planet.<sup>27</sup> The cultivation of loving kindness requires that "we make every effort to stop exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression...to promote the well-being of people, animals, plants and minerals."<sup>28</sup> This is done through individuals coming together as a community, looking deeply at the situation, exercising intelligence, and developing appropriate ways to address the most pressing problems in today's society. Exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression are all driving forces within overpopulation and overconsumption. This association is all the more apparent as we examine more of Nhat Hanh's works.

Of all the precepts, the fifth precept is the most specifically related to the issues of overpopulation and overconsumption. The fifth precept is traditionally translated as "I vow to refrain from taking intoxicants."<sup>29</sup> Nhat Hanh reimagines the fifth precept as, Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking and consuming. I vow to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the

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27. Thich Nhat Hanh's, *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts*, p. 128, 131.

28. Ven. W Sarada Maha Thera 1993, *Treasury of Truth Illustrated Dhammapada*, Taipei Taiwan, The Corporate Body of Buddha Educational Foundation, Verse 49 Page104 yathapi Bamaropupam.

29. Thich Nhat Hanh's, *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts*, p. 128, 131, 56, 127-132.

transformation of society.<sup>30</sup>

### State Responsibility towards sustainable consumption

The modern democracy and political ideology emerged in the west with deep influence of Christianity and science. While Christianity emphasizes that God create the world and animals for human consumption, science always wanted to conquer nature in various ways. Both these institutional attitudes to nature are not healthy. These attitudes led human beings to exploit and consume the resources at a rapid rate. But Buddhism goes beyond this point. It extends its protection to the animal and even plants. In Chakkavatthisihanada sutta<sup>31</sup> there was a wheel turning monarch. He keeps Dhamma (justice, righteousness) as his guide. He rules his kingdom righteously. He accorded guard to ward and protect for his own household, his troops, nobles, Brahmins and householders, town and country folks, ascetic, for beasts and birds. The most important fact in this Sutta, is the correlation between the king's righteousness and people righteousness. When the king becomes righteousness ministers, officers, the people and nature become righteousness. When the king becomes unrighteousness ministers, officers, the people and nature also become hostile and uncooperative.

A similar view is expressed in Adammika Sutta.<sup>32</sup> If the head of the state is corrupt it automatically spreads to the lowest strata in the society. When poverty strikes, it leads to degradation of morals, (stealing, using weapons, killing) again this leads to exploitation and pollution of natural resources in a more aggressive manner. It is the duty of the state to provide protection and look after welfare and best interest of the people. In Aganna Sutta<sup>33</sup> the Buddha gives an account of the origins and evolution of the human species. Self luminous and floating beings came to the world from Abassara

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30. *ibid.*

31. Walshe Maurice translator, *Long Discourse of the Buddha*. A translation of Diga Nikaya Wisdom Publication London 1987 Diga Nikaya 26 cakkavatti sihanada sutta page 395-396-397.

32. Board of Editors, *Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka Series*, Anguttara Nikaya, Government Press, Colombo, 1962 Adhammika Sutta, p.140-141.

33. Walshe Maurice translator, *Long Discourse of the Buddha*. A translation of Diga Nikaya Wisdom Publication London, 1987, Aganna Sutta 27 Diga Nikaya p. 409-410.

Brahma world, Gradually, self luminous beings became greedy. They took what is not given. They fought each other. They selected a king Earth was self-luminous beings become very greedy. They selected a king called “Mahasammata”. His duty was to protect the people and property. It is this level of trust is placed on state to protect best interest of its citizen. In Kutadanta Sutta<sup>34</sup> a Brahmin wanted to perform a sacrifice. In an answer to a question of this Brahmin, the Buddha explained to him how ancient king Maha Vijitha performed his sacrifice. His chaplain advised him to have bloodless sacrifice. His chaplain advised him to eradicate that poverty which was widely spread. His chaplain advised not to tax the citizen and also to distribute grain and fodder to those cultivate and rear animals to those who works in the trade give capital, and to those in the government services he assigned proper living wages.” With these incentives, once the country was prosperous the postponed sacrifice was performed. But in this sacrifice no animals were slain. No trees were cut for the sacrificial posts. The sacrifice was conducted in friendly atmosphere. The above discussion lights on the fact that Buddha really did not appreciate any form of violence to animals or plants. The State has a greater role to play in controlling consumerism. New incentives should be introduced for green consumers those who consume less and dispose their garbage properly. The governments must initiate tax incentives to moderate and green consumers.

The Buddhism emphasizes the power of mind over everything. The mind is the forerunner of everything. The mind has two streams of thought. Thought based on greed hatred and delusion are negative unwholesome and harmful. The thoughts based on generosity loving-kindness and wisdom is positive and wholesome. The Buddha taught that respect for life and the natural world is essential. The resources must not be exploited or over consumed. By living simply one can be in harmony with other creatures and learn to appreciate the interconnectedness of all lives. The simplicity of life involves developing openness to our environment and relating to the world with awareness and responsive perception. It also

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34. Walshe Maurice translator, *Long Discourse of the Buddha*. A translation of Diga Nikaya Wisdom Publication London 1987 Kutadantha Sutta Diga Nikaya 5 p. 136.

enables us to enjoy without possessing, and mutually benefit each without manipulation.”

There are very clear solution to the overconsumption. That is eight noble path come under four noble truths Right Understanding, Right Intent, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration. Whole noble eight fold path is directly relevant to human life style. We can shape up our life and consumption habits based on understanding and practice of Eight Noble path.<sup>35</sup> The solution is readily available.

The first noble truth, the Right Understanding can be used to understand the nature of overconsumption. It can be reinterpreted in the light of this discussion. Basically, Right Understanding means clear knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, The four noble truth are Suffering, cause of suffering, cessation of suffering and path leading to cessation of suffering. encompassing the “Three Basic Facts of Existence”: Anicca (Impermanence), Anatta (Pali for “non self” or “insubstantiality”; in Sankrit Anatman) and Dukkha (suffering or unsatisfactoriness). If we understand unsatisfactoriness of the consumption. Then we do not need to run after too much consumption no matter how much you consumed you will be unsatisfied. Without understanding the Four Noble Truths (the “diseases”) of what use is the “cure” (The Eightfold Path) cannot be used meaningfully. I will deal with few facts of the noble eight fold path.

Right thoughts is another important factor in the noble eight fold path to shape the overconsumption behavior. With clear knowledge, clear thinking follows suit. This is known as initial application (of knowledge).

Thoughts mould a person’s nature and direct their course and direction of action. Unwholesome thoughts will debase and erode a person’s character over time, while wholesome thoughts will lift him/her higher and higher up.

In particular, Right Thoughts are: Renunciation (Nekkhamma Sankappa) of worldly pleasures, and selflessness (altruism). This

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35. Board of Editors, *Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka Series*, Samyutta Nikaya, Government Press, Colombo, 1982 Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta p. 270.

is opposed to insatiable desires and selfishness. Loving-kindness (Metta) or good will towards people, including yourself; which is opposed to hatred, ill-will, aversion, dislike, detest and spite. Harmlessness (Avihimsa) or compassion, as opposed to cruelty and callousness. When these type of wholesome thoughts are maintained, IT is very hard to harm the environment and resources.

Right Livelihood is another important pillar of sustainable consumption. As long as your livelihood does not harm no one and that would include animal and the environment, since that impacts all beings then it's right livelihood. Buddha wouldn't put things in a negative context, but it should be obvious that any attempt at purifying thoughts, words and actions would be severely hindered by five kinds of trade / business / job that clearly are NOT right livelihood: Weapons (arms) production, Human slavery, Breeding of animals for slaughter / slaughtering animals per se, Illegal drugs (narcotics), alcohol, cigarettes and the like: producing anything known to be bad for sentient beings and Poisons: producing poisons, pollution and other harmful substances.

Right Effort is very good tool to cope with overconsumption. To do anything in life requires determination, persistence and energy. The sustained, lifelong practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, to lead a pure and spiritual life, is the very definition of Right Effort. Right effort includes developing good habits, such as practicing right mindfulness, right meditation and other positive moral acts in your daily life not just occasionally. The same effort should be taken to minimized negative effects of overconsumption.<sup>36</sup>

Right Mindfulness is practice of Right Mindfulness, in particular, requires Right Effort. It is the constant watching / observation of your town body and actions, feelings, thoughts and mental objects (your imagination / images in your mind).

This self-observation is useful in two major ways. It complements Vipassana (Insight) Meditation. Satipattana Sutta<sup>37</sup> As a subset to insight, it helps you gain better understanding of yourself, the ever-

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36. *ibid.*

37. Walshe Maurice trans, *Long Discourse of the Buddha*. A translation of Diga Nikaya Wisdom Publication London 1987 Maha Satipatthana Sutta, p.335.

changing (impermanent) nature of your own mind and body. It enables you to check any subconscious or careless mental / verbal / physical actions that are negative or bad. Anapanasati, mindfulness of breath, helps cultivate the seven factors of awakening as defined in the Anapanasati Sutta: sati (mindfulness) dhammavicaya (analysis) viriya (persistence) piti (rapture) passadhi (serenity) samadhi (concentration) upekkha (equanimity). When you develop a peaceful mind, you can judge what you really want to consume for sustenance of life without getting into a consumerism trap.

It is clear that we have remedies at hand to tackle overconsumption. It is a matter of how genuine our effort to combat overconsumption and make our planet sustainable and continue for future generations. We can cope with these burning issues at several levels - Individual level, societal level, corporate level, government level and international level,

At individual level, the person can reduce his/her personal consumption moderately. The person can grow more trees. If no space is available, at least more plants can be grown to absorb carbon dioxide.

We can win the fight for sustainability for future generations. Sustainability is the ability to hold or endure the nature without degradation or destruction. We can see an ideal environmentally friendly nation is the Kingdom of Bhutan. Bhutan is not only carbon neutral, it is carbon negative. They sell clean Green hydro powered electricity to neighbouring countries. They give free electricity to villagers to prevent burning of firewood for cooking or heating. Their country's 72 percent of entire land is covered with forest. It is compulsory to have minimum 60 percent forest coverage of the entire land by Bhutanese constitution. Recently the government built a forest biological corridor to connect all the national forests so that animals can freely move around the forests. The government takes action to prevent poaching, hunting, mining and pollution in their parks. Recently, the Bhutan government has planned to convert all government offices to operate paperless. The Bhutanese government gives subsidies to buy hybrid or electric cars and LED lights in order to reduce environmental damage.

“The Buddha’s teaching is to utilize nature in the same way as a bee collects pollen from a flower, 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 without harming the natural world in which he lives.” (In Singalovada sutta<sup>38</sup> “Ekenabhogebhunjeyya, dvhikammarppayojaye, catutthmcanidhapeyya, apadasubhavissati” The income of the householder should be divided the income into four portions. Out of the four, one portion should be used for his daily expenses. Two portions should be used for the progression of his business. One portion should be deposited carefully for the use in future in the case of emergency. If income of householder is used properly as advised by the Buddha. There is no room for overconsumption.

The Buddhist ethics and right mindfulness are very important in this regard. Ethics and values must be part of our daily life. Then we can be accounted of our actions. Ethics will help us to be responsible for our actions. All aspect of life should be guided by ethics. Material prosperity should not be achieved at the expense of moral values. Thus economics should be subordinated to ethics. If right mindfulness is developed by the consumer the overconsumption can be moderated by the consumer himself. In Ambalathika Rahulovada Sutta the Buddha advised his own son as follows. “Rahula, when you wish to do an action with body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action thus: ‘would this action that, I wish to do with the body lead to my own affliction or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both? Is it an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results? When you reflect, if you know: This action I wish to do with the body would lead to my own affliction or to the affliction of others or to affliction of both; it is unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results,’ then you should not do such action with body”<sup>39</sup>. This quotation represents self correcting test.

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38. Ven. W Sarada Maha Thera 1993, *Dhammapada*, Taipe Taiwan, The Corporate Body of Buddha Educational Foundation, Verse 49 p104 yathapi bamaropupam.”

39. Bhikkhu Nanamoli (Translator), Bhikkhu Bodhi (Translator) *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, 1995, 2015, Wisdom Publications, Massachusettes, USA Ratthapala Sutta 82 Sutta, p. 687 “sabban pahaya gamaniyan”.

Where a person can determine for himself, Whether his actions are beneficial or harmful to himself and the society at large?. Whether his consumption are beneficial or harmful to himself and the society at large?. The world is driven by supply and demand but if this can be changed from supply and demand to necessity to supply The world would be a better place to live. “Bahuno janassa attaya hitaya sukaya” The Buddhist attitude is to concern for the good, happiness and benefit of the vast majority of people. One is called upon to ask the question whether such action has good results on oneself or on others? One has to probe into this aspect very carefully: paccavekkhitva paccavekkhitva kammam kattabbam.

## CONCLUSION

As explained in Rattapala Sutta “The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind’ :” Since there cannot be a true ownership. Why are we trying to possess many things during our short life span at the cost of harming many living beings and damaging others but we have to leave everything behind at our death.<sup>40</sup> We are leading towards self-destruction, precipice by trying to pursuing or chasing limitless wealth from through infinite growth in finite world. In this process we have destroyed and destabilized very life supporting ecosystems and other supporting conditions. I prefer to end this discussion with quotation of Dalai Lama: “*The world grows smaller and smaller, more and more inter-dependent..... today more than ever before life must be characterized by a sense of Universal responsibility, not only nation to nation and human to human, but also human to other forms of life*” (H.H. the Dalai Lama).

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40. Bhikkhu Nanamoli (Translator), Bhikkhu Bodhi (Translator) *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, 1995, 2015 Wisdom Publications, Massachusetts, USA Ambalattika Rahulovada Sutta MN 61 p. 524.