

SUSTAINABLE LIVING AS SEEN FROM THE VYAGGHAPAJJA SUTTA AND KUTADANTA SUTTA FROM THE BUDDHIST PALI CANONICAL TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Human beings are considered an intelligent species of all living beings. And it is rightly so. Since ancient times the human mind seeks happiness. Happiness in prosperity and well-being. The wonders of the material world are dynamically evolving within the limitless capacity of human thought. However, the worldly accomplishments fail to ingrain happiness. Even adversely affecting our natural resources getting depleted rapidly and some permanently damaged and extinct. The question arises, then, how do we as humans live and progress in a sustainable way. Understanding the gravity of the situation, the word 'Sustainability' was introduced in 1987 by United Nations through 'The Report of the Brundtland Commission'. It was then that the UN General Assembly, for the first time, sought to establish policies for sustainable development. The definition of Sustainable Development in the report is: "Sustainable development is development that *meets the needs of the present* without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Sustainable living is a very challenging situation we humans are

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facing today. The challenge is to define the ‘need of the hour’. In the time and place we are on this earth today; the issues of sustainability vary diversely. Having said that, it is very difficult to find a simple solution to address this issue. How do we set policies? How can we define the needs of the people? What are the fundamental guidelines or principles which act as benchmarks for drawing that subtle line between ‘need’ and ‘want’? Our ancient Pali texts contain the words of the ‘Enlightened One’, the *Sakyamuni* Buddha. Not only people approached the Buddha came to seek answers. The Buddha showed the path from suffering to happiness. The Buddha taught the world the good and the bad. Two reasons why the Pali canonical texts seem important to me are: Firstly, the Suttas not just mention the relevance of time and place, but Buddha also addresses the psychological aspect of the human while providing the solution. And Secondly, but most importantly, the Buddha provided answers possible to do within the human capacity. This paper attempts to seek insight from the wisdom of our ancient *Pāli* Canonical literature.

The Buddha provides a solution clearly defining between a ‘need’ and ‘want’. For those who have much as well as for those who have not, the Buddha leads them to a happy well-being. The title of my paper is: ‘*Vyagghapajja Sutta – An insight towards Responsible Consumption and Sustainable Development*’. This paper endeavors to draw inspiration from the *Vyagghapajja Sutta* and discusses the conditions of welfare which are much relevant for the lay people in any case - of a person, community or a nation. The Sutta provides guidelines for two-fold progress- worldly as well as spiritually. The Buddha instructs how to preserve, increase and prevent loss of wealth through the conditions conducive to happiness in this very life and in the future.

Suffering (*Dukkha*) is inherent in the ‘The Four Noble Truths’. It is the human suffering which gives rise to human birth. Right from the time of birth to the time of death, beings go through suffering. It is well within the human capacity to overcome suffering right in this very life, through wholesome *actions* of body speech and mind; where mind is the foremost, as mentioned in the *Dhammapada* Verse 2:

Manasā ce pasannena, bhāsati vā karoti vā, tato naṃ sukhamanveti, chāyā'va anapāyini!

Human actions driven by a polluted mind brings suffering and by a pure mind brings happiness. We find from the Suttas that the Buddha through His teachings transformed the minds of the people from a polluted, unclear mind to a pure, clear mind. The words He spoke to the bereaved men cleared their path towards happiness. The Buddha leads the suffering mind towards a mind with real happiness. The Buddha's Dhamma is to bring happiness to mankind. His teachings are the process of bringing that real happiness which springs from the heart within. Whatever be the past, it is possible to bring about this change from suffering to happiness in the present here and now based on our actions today. The Buddha's teachings enlighten the path and instill hope in however times of distress towards a life of balanced livelihood.

1. INTRODUCTION

Much has been already said about the materialistic disparity and inner restlessness in the world. Man's search for a better way of living on this little blue planet continues all the more than ever. Issues like insufficient food, water and shelter; waste generation and management; global warming and melting glaciers; green-house gases and natural disasters; pollution of air, water, land and sound; and the extinction of living species and ecological degradation, are the concerns of today's millennia. Since 1972, the first United Nations meeting, the environmental crisis is still with us; We can see that there are no ready-made answers to these questions. How do we look at seeking a way forward?

'Ultimately, the environmental crisis is a crisis of the mind. And likewise, appropriate development is ultimately an appropriate development of the mind. We see, do, and are what we think, and what we think is shaped by our cultures, faiths, and beliefs'.¹

It is the human mind, the most intellectual of the lot on this planet who has dominated the environment to its degradation where it stands today. There seem to be hardly any limitations to the recklessly diverse modes of human wants. These boundaries need to be re-defined appropriately. Hence it is in the human

potential and endeavour to act towards appropriate development in a responsible manner. The World Wide Fund International since 1986, attempts to set up a dialogue between various major faiths and beliefs in relation to the environment. Thus, Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) was founded in 1995 with the perspective that religions and human developments should go hand-in-hand so that this world is a better place for life.

The inner mind is very closely interlinked with the external environment and vice versa. When we talk about the mind, who can be our better teacher than the Buddha. ‘Mano pubbangama dhamma...’ Mind is the foremost...! What is the outlook from the perspective of the Buddha’s words, the Suttas as laid down in the Pali Canonical literature? An attempt is made to look at certain fundamental issues if not all, assuming the relevance of the Buddha’s Teachings as universally applicable in time and space, more so from the behavioural aspect of human nature arising from greed, ill-will and ignorance. This paper ‘*Sustainable Living As Seen From The Vyagghapajja And Kutadanta Sutta From The Buddhist Pali Canonical Texts*’, attempts to look at the aforementioned issues from the Buddhist perspective, with major emphasis on the context of the *Vyagghapajja Sutta* and other supporting Suttas. In the *Vyagghapajja Sutta*, the Buddha admonishes how a rich person should progress in life- both worldly and spiritually. Whereas, in the *Kutadanta Sutta*, the Buddha recognizes the major economic problems of state and he recommends immediate measures.

The Buddha’s Middle Path of non-indulgence in the two extremes of too much and too little:

The increasing flux of the human population is rapidly moving ahead with too much facilities on one side and even devoid of needs on the other. Those who have much, live a life of extravagant luxury and those who have not suffer too much in misery. In the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the Buddha’s first sermon to the ‘*pancavaggiya bhikkhus*’, the Buddha straightway refutes both these extremes. The Buddha warns, “*Dve me Bhikkhave anta na sevitabba...*”. He further instructs them to follow the path He has discovered, a completely different path, of ‘*Majjhima-patipada* -the Middle Path’ called as ‘*Ariyo Atthangiko Maggo* - the Noble

Eightfold Path', the Path of Enlightenment, the Path of coming out of misery- human suffering, the Path to happiness. The goal of the entire Pali Canon and the Buddha's Teachings therein is the path to come out of suffering, not just for the welfare and happiness of human beings but for those in the entire existences.

Inner turbulence arises from the lack of basic needs of sufficient food, drinkable water and proper shelter. Poverty is miserable. The Buddha despised poverty. The Buddha clearly states the thirty-eight points of welfare and blessings – the *Mahamangala Sutta-sippanca susikkhito* – Here He instructs to improve skilfulness in work is of great welfare. To come out of poverty, one should do by own self- *attahi attano natho*. Doing dana- sharing of whatever you have – even as simple as a smile is a *kusala kamma*- wholesome deed. *Kusalakammam sukhavipakam lakkhanam*- 'good deed yields happiness' is the Universal Law of Nature. The 'dasa kusalakammapatha' are defined as the ten good actions of body, speech and mind.

On the other hand, the Buddha's Teaching begins with the concept of 'Daana'- generosity and sharing. In the teaching to the *pancavaggiya* bhikkhus, the Buddha begins with telling the *dana katha* first, and then the *sila katha*- the virtues. Following *sila* or virtues purifies the mind. Pollution of mind is the cause of external pollution. The human tendency of the craving mind gives rise to the three poisons of greed, ill-will and delusion. A human mind relates not just with the surrounding environment of man and man, man and animals, man and trees but also man with his own self. Buddhism has a scientific approach towards life with emphasis on non-theistic spirituality and societal morality, wherein the responsibility of societal morality originates from within, from his own personal ethics.

2. THE VYAGGHAPAJJA SUTTA

In the *Vyagghapajja Sutta* from *Anguttara Nikaya*, first the Buddha teaches the four conditions which lead to materialistic gain and which is useful to lead a good life on this earth. The Buddha further elaborates to explain each of these four conditions with simile on how to maintain a good life. The Buddha warns, that it is not enough

to be rich. For a future life, one needs to work towards cultivating a spiritual life. Thus, the life of a person becomes meaningful and well.

In the *Vyagghapajja Sutta*, a rich *Koliya* named *Digghajanu Vyagghapajja* (Family name is *TigerPaw*) comes to the Buddha at the market town of *Kakkarapatta*. Having approached, respectfully salutes the Buddha, sits on one side, and requests the Buddha to instruct him as to how he can develop his life towards welfare. The Buddha admonish him by stating the four conditions each of Worldly and Spiritual progress conducive to the householder's weal and happiness, thus-

Four conditions conducive to worldly progress in this very life of a householder are the four accomplishments of- persistent effort (*utthana-sampada*), watchfulness (*arakkha-sampada*), good friendship (*kalyanamittata*) and balanced livelihood (*sama-jivikata*).

The first accomplishment is intended for a layperson to be persistently initiate, by whichever occupation earns a just livelihood is skilful and untiring. The second accomplishment is that he protects his acquired wealth from thieves and kings and from natural calamities like fire. The fourth accomplishment is of balance in earning and spending wealth; but not a miser nor a spend-thrift. Spending should be well within one's earnings. A person who spends more than he earns is like one shaking the entire wood-apple tree for fulfilling his hunger of few wood-apples. By shaking the entire tree, many wood-apples fall on the ground and are wasted.

"Thus, energetic and heedful in his tasks, wisely administering his wealth, he lives a balanced life, protecting what he has amassed, and leads a life of moderation, even so these four conditions are the sources of increase in his amassed wealth. Just as when a tank with four inlets open and four outlets closed and rain water falling from above in the tank, definitely increases the level of water in the tank."

Further the Buddha explains the four sources for the increase of amassed wealth as abstinence from debauchery and drunkenness, non-indulgence in gambling, and friendship with the good. Good friendship (*kalyanamittata*) is defined as highly cultured: one who is full of faith (*saddha*), virtue (*sila*), charity (*caga*), and wisdom (*panna*). He acts in accordance with the faith of the faithful, with

the virtue of the virtuous, with the charity of the charitable, with the wisdom of the wise. This is called good friendship.

Developing *Kalyanamittata* is the life of spiritual advancement. Money and wealth are good for the present life but just being wealthy is not enough. It is important for householders to accomplish for spiritual advancement. The four conditions conducive to spiritual progress in future life are the four accomplishments (*sampada*) of faith- (*saddha*), virtue (*sila*), charity (*caga*) and wisdom (*panna*). A person thus working diligently, clears the path that leads to his well-being in future life.

The *Kutadanta Sutta*, the Buddha's focus is on the righteous rule-

For the poor, the major worry that hankers them is the very aspect of survival- food.

Ekam namam kim? Ekam nama aharatthitikam!

“What is that one thing for (sustenance of) living beings?”

“All living beings need food to sustain themselves.”

People need a job which can fetch meals for them and their families. Thus, the basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing should be satisfied first. Devoid of employment support, people resort to various unlawful means of livelihood to sustain themselves. The Buddha says that it is in the larger interest of the state to generate and support employment in such a way that the root problem of food production and distribution is addressed. It is the responsibility of the country to support in organizing cultivation, then providing funds to traders and a reasonable salary to the government employees. When the nation takes up the responsibility, it can work out proper strategies and channels in the benefit of all the people and of the entire land. The risk of harming the environment can be minimised through setting an appropriate system. As BD Dipananda put it, “The economic concepts discussed in the Buddha's teachings are neither of a capitalist market economy, nor a fully socialist economy. Instead, the Buddha provides for a developmental approach to the solution to human poverty. In the context of the 21st century, when global inequality is once again on the rise, the teachings of the Buddha remain highly pertinent.”

3. EMPEROR ASOKA – DEVANAMPIYA - THE BELOVED OF THE GODS - A CASE STUDY

Emperor Asoka during his reign after embracing Buddhism, also called Dhammasoka, strived for the welfare of his subjects, as guided by his teacher, Thera Mogaliputtatissa. The inscriptions and edicts speak volumes of his just rule supporting his people far and wide, thereby establishing peace and happiness. The ability of one to follow these basic precepts can be well seen in the measures adopted by Emperor Asoka for the benefit of his subjects over the vast Asian sub-continent; wherein he not only stopped killing of animals for food but also set up hospitals for animals for the first time, in history. He constructed long and wide highways, which were shaded with trees on both sides of the roads for the benefit of human and animals. For water to drink, he caused to dug wells. In the archaeological evidences reveals, his motivation for people to follow the Dhamma, to respect parents, and be generous towards friends, relatives and wise men.

In the *Mahavamsa* and some of his inscriptions he mentions how he himself follows the life of Dhamma. Whereas in his edicts, he orders his subjects to abstain from immoral things. The King further writes that this edict has been written so that it may please his successors to devote themselves to these things and not let them decline. Even today, we can look towards those glorious days to draw parallels meticulously and seek contemporary applicable ideas. 'Thus Asoka's reformation to encourage people to inculcate kindness, self-examination, truthful, gratitude, purity of heart, enthusiasm, strong loyalty, self-control and love of the Dhamma, emerges from his edicts as he being an able administrator, intelligent human being and a practising dedicated Buddhist', says Venerable Dhammiko.

4. IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

It is certain that education is the key medium for true progress towards sustainable development of mankind. Chia-Ling Wang emphasizes the need for Education in Sustainable Development ESD. Wang believes that sustainability is a dynamic process generally relating to ecological, political, economic and societal implications (Filho, Manolas, & Pace, 2009).

To foster development through cultivation of ecologically responsible citizens and consumers, a UNESCO report (2012) released by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development defines ESD as follows:

“ESD is education for the future, for everyone to acquire the values, competencies, skills and knowledge that are necessary to shape sustainable development.”

The Buddha’s method of teaching the people should be propagated at this hour. Because we see that the Buddha’s Dhamma is not dependent on an external entity to seek help to find solutions to human problems. With a belief that all problems are man-made and hence it is worthwhile to try to find solutions through human effort. It does not put off the problems for someone else to work upon, but rather accepts and takes responsibility. Even though the vision based on Buddhist literature provides a solution relevant to the context at that time; the impermanence of nature adds up its own dynamic aspect of the issue under consideration. Hence, temporal and spatial analysis considered will provide finer details in application of the wisdom of Buddha’s Teachings in our day to day lives.

5. CONCLUSION

Thus, the *Kutadanta Sutta* teaches path of welfare of the state and *Vyagghapajja Sutta* teaches the actions which leads a person towards worldly welfare in this life and spiritual advancement for welfare in future life. Thus, the Pali texts provide ample examples of the uniqueness of the Buddha’s teachings- the *Dhamma*. Primarily, the teachings invigorate to find a solution within the capacity of human efforts. The Dhamma encourages upliftment of the self through practical striving as a way of life. ‘*Atta hi attano natho*’. The Buddha’s dhamma teaches to accept and take responsibility for our own actions. *Kammassaka, bandhu*... And Buddhism also tells us how mind makes us do the things we do. How our mind is the forerunner of all actions, verbally and bodily - *Mano pubbangama dhamma*. Above all, the intention matters most: *cetanaham bhikkhave kammam vadami!*

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