

A WAY TO ECONOMIC STABILITY THROUGH BUDDHISM

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Buddhism, which was propounded by the Lord Buddha some two thousand five hundred and fourteen years ago, has often been misinterpreted and misunderstood as a religion which only deals with philosophical or spiritual values rather than social and economic welfare and material progress of its devotees.

It is useful to refer to an incident occurred at that time, where a hungry and a feeble person was fed by the Lord Buddha Himself, before He delivered a sermon to the members of the laity. Lord Buddha was fully aware that a true religious life is not possible under adverse and unfavourable material conditions and thereby on numerous occasions He had showed the way to economic stability and social progress of mankind, not only by enunciating such good practices but He himself practising the same.

In an illuminating and an instructive discourse to Dighajanu, an influential and recognised citizen of Kakkarapatta, the market town of Koliyans, Lord Buddha has shown in unequivocal and unmistakable terms, how a Buddhist could achieve economic stability and material progress. He showed that four noble qualities which are of great importance today to all of us irrespective of caste, creed or community, if we are to emerge from economic difficulties.

1. The achievement or accomplishment of persistent effort – **UTTHANA SAMPADA.**
2. The achievement of a balanced livelihood - **SAMAJIVIKATA.**
3. The achievement of protection of one's wealth - **ARAKKHA SAMPADA.**
4. The achievement of good friendship - or **KALYANAMITTATA.**

The Buddha realised the importance of the farmer and the trader who play a vital role in the economic development and the material prosperity of a country. Agriculture which has been at a prime source of income for immemorial times and had been the noblest and the greatest industry ever known at that time. Village folks had a peaceful co-existence in the most important events like the **NAKATHA** (or auspicious time) and **KAYIYA** (sharing of labour) etc. at which

entire village join hands in celebrations. Even though this is not experienced to the fullest capacity at the present day, one could visualise the same by participating in ceremonies and rituals that are held now in respect of sowing and harvesting of crops.

Both the clergy and laity considered crop cultivation important not purely as a means of occupation but also as source of achieving health, wealth, and happiness to the Community as a whole. Thus in the VINAYA (code of ethics for the clergy and the laity) it is regarded as one of the three major activities.

This does not mean that Lord Buddha never advocated any other accepted form of living. What He stressed was, that in whatever job one is engaged one should be honest, efficient, earnest and energetic. Therefore one could appreciate particularly under the present circumstances the validity and necessity of the immutable and eternal truth preached by the Buddha over two thousand five hundred years ago.

On numerous occasions the Blessed One has advocated two noble qualities which would result success in the mundane and super mundane worlds. The two qualities He referred to are the strenuous effort (UTANA VIRIYA) and the wisdom to see things as they are (PANNA). The Buddha in his own words had said 'PANNA WANTHASSA YANG DHAMMO – NAYANJ DHAMMO DUPPANNASSA — that this doctrine is for the energetic, intellectual persons and not for the indolents."

A person should strive hard to act on which will help him not to be involved in the frittering away of his own wealth.

They are:

1. Debauchery or sexual misconduct (ITTHIDUTTHO)
2. Drunkenness or the intemperate use of intoxicants and drugs (SURADUTTHO).
3. Indulgence in gambling (AKKHADUTTHO).
4. Friendship, companionship and intimate association with evil doers.

It is not necessary to discuss these four factors in great details as each one of them is self-explanatory. But it would be interesting to enumerate out these four factors when not used properly to bring about the destruction of wealth. Just as in the case of a great tank with four inlets and outlets, if a man should close the inlets and open the outlets, and there should be more adequate rain-

fall, decrease of water is to be expected in that tank, and not an increase, this situation will prevail even in the destruction of amassed wealth.

The abstinence from these social vices will increase ones wealth and result in economic stability, health and prosperity.

The Buddha has advocated simple living according to ones means.

At a time where the man is clamouring for more wants and better things in life, it is most opportune to pay attention to the two qualities namely simplicity and contentment, which the Enlightened One enunciated very frequently. The human nature is such that nobody is satisfied with what he gets. Austerity and self-restraining are two virtues highly regarded by Buddhists. And furthermore these two qualities are regarded as ideals of life by many religions. A man in the midst of all riches will not be contented. But on the other hand contented man, under no circumstance will allow his contentment to be conditioned by either the possession of riches or the lack of it. He is satisfied with his present position and always feels free to detach from the worldly bindings. This would be entirely different with the dissatisfied person, who in the midst of all riches will still not be satisfied.

In the achievement of circumspection, or protection of one's wealth Lord Buddha had said that "whatever wealth the clansman holds and acquired by dint of effort, by strength of arms, by the sweat of his brow which he has deposited for safe keeping over this wealth he keeps and watch and ward so that kings might not seize them, robbers might steal them, fire might not burn them, floods might not wash them and selfish heirs might not appropriate them. This does not mean that one should act like a miser, but that one should be circumspect and parsimonious".

On another occasion the Blessed One has pointed out how an ordinary layman could achieve material comfort and happiness in this life by earning his livelihood through just and righteous means. He had shown how this money could be spent on himself, his wife and children, relatives and on meritorious deeds.

A layman who adheres to the Buddhist way of life enjoys four kinds of happiness. He enjoys economy security or sufficient wealth acquired by just and righteous means (ATTHI SUKHA), when he makes his own living without resorting to the five wrong types of trade namely, trading in arms, in living-beings, in meat, in intoxicants and in poisons.

A person who himself abstains in black-marketeering, unreasonable profiteering, trickery, deceit, bribery, corruption, fraud, hoarding of wealth and food etc. is considered to be accumulating wealth in the correct way. A person who amasses wealth should not harm anybody in the process just as a bee extracts honey out of a flower without causing even a slightest damage to the flower.

Thus the Buddhist believes that exploitation particularly in the process of amassing wealth could lead to disharmony and in breach of peace.

One who spends his wealth liberally on himself, his family, his friends and on meritorious deeds will enjoy the happiness referred to as BHOGA SUGHA.

Thirdly, when a person adheres to the principles enumerated above will feel and have the satisfaction of not being in debt to anybody (ANANA SUGHA). This feeling of free from debts is a feeling that most of our people who spend their wealth lavishly cannot enjoy. This is because they unnecessarily get into debts by spending lavishly on funerals, weddings, parties etc.

The fourth happiness one could enjoy is one that you enjoy by not becoming a nuisance to others (ANAVAJJA SUKHA). Unlike the above mentioned happiness enjoyed by a person on economic reasons the ANAVAJJA SUKHA is derived out of a faultless and good life.

Buddhism teaches that material progress is based on moral and spiritual values of a person, and therefore a society blended with both these economic and spiritual progress could be considered as a most stabilised society. At this instance you may refer to King Dharmasoka's regime where such stability had prevailed.

Buddhists believe economic in security is the main cause of crime and other misdeeds. In the KUTADANTHA SUTTA OF THE DIGHA NIKAYA, the Buddha states that in order to raise the Socio-economic standards of the country, the farmers and businessmen should be provided with all opportunities and the employees be paid well. When there is economic stability there will be peace and harmony.

The Buddha has few guidelines for the Rulers. The Blessed One believes that a Ruler should do away with favour (CHANDA), anger (DHOSA), fear (BHAYA) and delusion or the unawareness (MOHA) in their thoughts and actions.

Further He has laid down a set of guidelines based on the DASA RAJA DHARMA (A code of ethics for good government) in which He advocates a form of government which will bring health, wealth, and happiness to the people as well as security in co-operation to the Governors.

Thus we see that Buddhism advocates material success and spiritual success of an individual and the society as a whole. Further Buddhists believe that the society cannot move from good to better unless its members live "a life of goodwill and a life of service" towards its members. When the individuals who comprise a society act according to the Buddha's lines of thought as discussed above, achieving material progress and economic stability will not be difficult.