

Buddhist Virtues: The Foundations of Socio-Economic Development - A Study

*Dr. D. Gopalakrishna & Amar Datt
Bangalore University, Bangalore, India.*

In Buddhism, the spirituality and the socio-economic development go together. It can be compared to a chariot, where the spirituality (charioteer) leads the two wheels of socio-economic development (the holistic model is shown in the coming pages). The Buddhist Virtues, precepts and principles are the foundations which develop peace and harmony, establishing spirituality and socio-economic equality. Violation of these Principles creates disharmony, socio-economic disparities and the spiritual degradation spreading violence, conflict, greed, hatred, increasing Dukkha and heart burn.

The world is burning today, with the fire of lust, hate and delusion (Samyuttanikaya, XXXV, 28). The world is established on suffering, is founded on suffering - Dukkhe loko patitthito (S.i.40). The single problem has different aspects. They may be socio-economic, political, psychological and even religious problem (Ven. Piyadassi, 1991). The socio-economic inequalities have resulted in aggravating the suffering in the present modern world due to craving. "Tangle within, tangle without, mankind is entangled in a tangle. I ask this question, Gotama. Who disentangles this tangle?" When the wise man well established in virtue (Sila) develops concentration (Citta-samadhi) and wisdom (Panna), then as Bhikkhu ardent and prudent, he disentangles this tangle (S.i.13.). The solution for this problem of dukkha-conflict-the unsatisfactoriness of life is the Noble Eightfold Path put forward by Buddha. These are the Virtue (Sila), Concentration (Samadhi) and the Wisdom (Panna). The virtue regulates the behavior, strengthens the meditation, meditation in turn develops wisdom. The Virtue tend to elevate the man which all can cultivate irrespective of creed, color, race, or sex, the earth can be transformed into a paradise where all can live in perfect peace and harmony as ideal citizens of one world. Buddhists four sterling virtues - Metta, Karuna, Mudita, Upekka, which are collectively termed as Brahamaviharas in Pali. Metta embraces all beings, Karuna embraces sufferers, Mudita embraces the prosperous, and Upekka embraces the good and the bad, the loved and unloved, the pleasant and the unpleasant (Ven. Narada Thera, 1997). These are building blocks of spiritual and socio-economic development. Buddhism shows the path to accumulate wealth provided without violating any of the five precepts; refrain from killing, stealing, adultery, lying and taking intoxicants. Since the Buddhist sees the essence of civilization not in multiplication of wants but in the purification of human character (E F Schumacher, 1993). It is the view of Buddhism that the economic activity and its results must provide the basis of support for a good and noble life, one of individual and social development (Ven. Bhikkhu Payutto, 1992). While encouraging material progress, Buddhism always lays great stress on moral and spiritual character for a happy, peaceful and contented society (Ven. Walpola Rahula, 1978). In the several Suttas (to mention a few - Sigalovada Sutta, Kosambiya

Sutta, Vyaggapajja Sutta, Alavaka Sutta, Sabbasava Sutta, Mangala Sutta, Cakkavattisihananda Sutta, etc.) Buddha explained the ways to earn virtuously and share the wealth to establish peace and harmony in the society. Buddhist precepts, principles and virtues are followed in some countries like Bhutan - Gross National Happiness model, Thailand - Sufficiency Economy model, Sri Lanka - Sarvodaya model and Taiwan for improving the spiritual and socio-economic conditions in the society.

The values in the society have deteriorated due to materialistic and exclusive pursuit of wealth. The selfish approach has made the human society to disregard and forget the morals, ethics, kindness and compassion. The biggest problem humanity has created for itself is the increasing gap between the rich and the poor and the unequal social structure. Poverty, hunger, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, unemployment, social discrimination continues to be the scourge of our times. The things that matter most – meaning, purpose, community, love – might be harder than ever to find (Jon Evans, 2010). To lead a happy and contented life and maintain the socio-economic equalities in the society, it is important to look into both spiritual and material development needs. Spiritual development alone or material development alone is not adequate to lead a happy life. However, when a person concentrates only on material aspects as happening in the present modern capitalist system the material needs may become an end in itself, resulting in limitless desires, greed and craving. The consequences of materialistic behavior give rise to conflicts, disharmony, social and economic inequalities in the society. These inequalities have resulted in further aggravating the suffering in the present modern world. According to the Human development Report, 2010 of UNDP, Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which is a measure of serious deprivations in the dimensions of health, education and living standards that combines the number of deprived and intensity of their deprivations indicate that about 1.75 billion people in the 104 countries covered by the MPI- a third of their population live in multidimensional poverty, that is, with atleast 30 percent of the indicators reflecting acute deprivation in health, education and standard of living. The world is passing through difficult times inspite of scientific and technological progress. The goal of just and peaceful civilization continues to be elusive and the man made panacea has failed to provide peace, happiness and harmony in the society (D. Gopalakrishna, 2006).

The solution for this suffering lies in the practice of spirituality. Buddhists Middle Path balances both spirituality and materialism to lead the contented life on the principles of sharing and caring. Buddhist virtues, precepts and principles focus on establishing peace and harmony through spiritual and socio-economic development in the society. The virtue regulates the behavior, strengthens the meditation, meditation in turn develops wisdom. The Virtue tend to elevate the man which all can cultivate irrespective of creed, color, race, or sex, the earth can be transformed into a paradise where all can live in perfect peace and harmony as ideal citizens of one world. The Buddhists four sterling virtues act as building blocks of spiritual and socio-economic development are - Metta, Karuna, Mudita, Upekka, which are collectively termed as Brahamaviharas in Pali are means to develop friendship, harmonious relationship, removing discord, establishing peace within oneself. The first sublime state is universal love (Metta). It is defined as the

sincere wish for the welfare and genuine happiness of all living beings without exception (Ven. Narada Thera, 1997). The second virtue is Compassion (Karuna). It is defined as that which makes the hearts of the good quiver when others are subjected to suffering or which dissipates the suffering of others. It removes the woes of others. The third virtue is Sympathetic joy or appreciative joy (Mudita), which tends to destroy jealousy, its direct enemy. The fourth virtue is Equanimity (Upekkha). It is discerning rightly, viewing justly or looking impartially, that is without attachment or aversion, without favour or disfavor. These virtues are the foundations of socio-economic development.

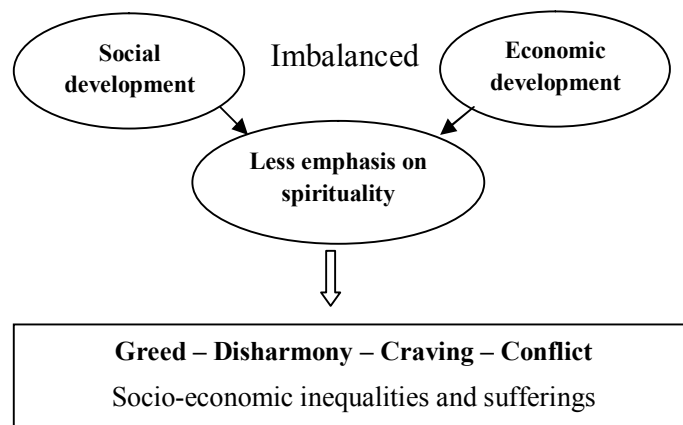
The practice of Pancasila as advocated by Buddha – not to harm others, not to take others property, not to indulge in misconduct, not to take intoxicants and to lead truthful life helps in overcoming negativities and establish spiritualistic society (D. Gopalakrishna, 2006).

The Chariot Model: Spiritualism and Socio-economic Development go together.

In Buddhism, the spirituality and the socio-economic development go together. The Buddha was interested in the happiness of men. According to Buddha happiness was not possible without leading a pure life based on moral and spiritual principles (Ven. Walpola rahula, 1972). It is the view of Buddhism that the economic activity and its results must provide the basis of support for a good and noble life, one of individual and social development (Ven. Bhikkhu Payutto, 1992). While encouraging material progress, Buddhism always lays great stress on moral and spiritual character for a happy, peaceful and contented society (Ven. Walpola Rahula, 1978). Buddhism shows the path to accumulate wealth through right livelihood.

The impact of spiritualism on socio-economic development or conditions in the society is illustrated through the *Chariot model*. This model gives an insight on the role of spirituality in establishing peace, happiness and harmony through spiritual and socio-economic development. Here the charioteer is represented by ‘spirituality’ and the two wheels of a chariot represent social and economic dimensions respectively. Two models and four diagrams viz. fig 1 and 1a – **Chariot model – Materialistic Society** the chariot in reverse order, and fig 2 and 2a – **Chariot model – Spiritualistic Society** the chariot in right order, is presented below:

Fig. 1 Chariot model – Materialistic Society.



More emphasis on materialistic benefits and less emphasis on spirituality.

The fig.1 shows the standing of materialistic society in which the spirituality is regarded as inconsequential and the selfish approach has made the human society to disregard and forget the morals, ethics, kindness and compassion leading to inequalities in the economic and social conditions in the society and immense sufferings by the most vulnerable. It is due to flagrant violations of principles of Dhamma that there are social inequalities and oppressions exist. The fig. 1a, shows the intricacies of materialistic society.

Fig. 1a Materialistic focused society

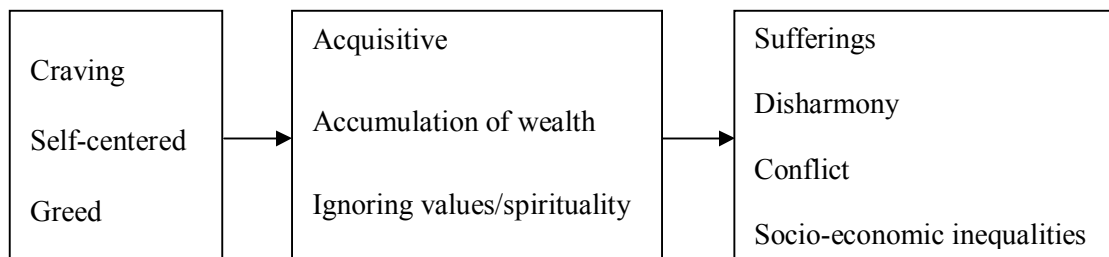
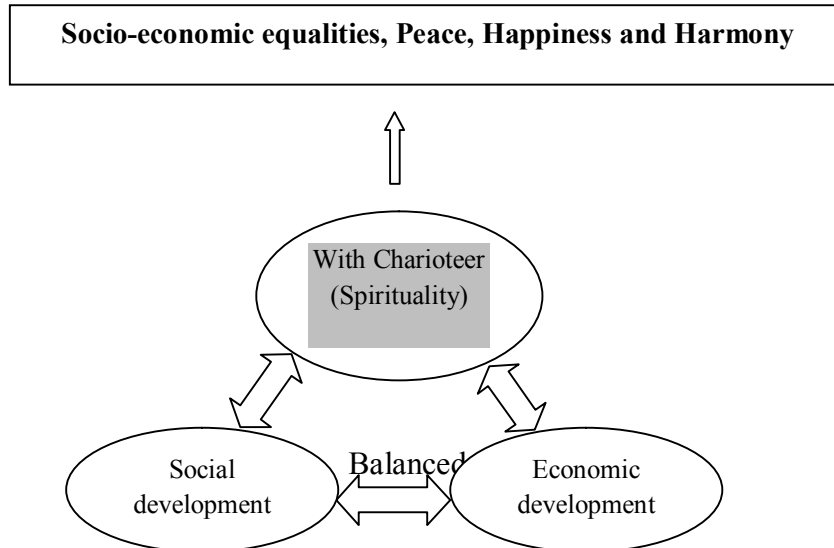


Fig. 2 Chariot model – Spiritualistic Society.

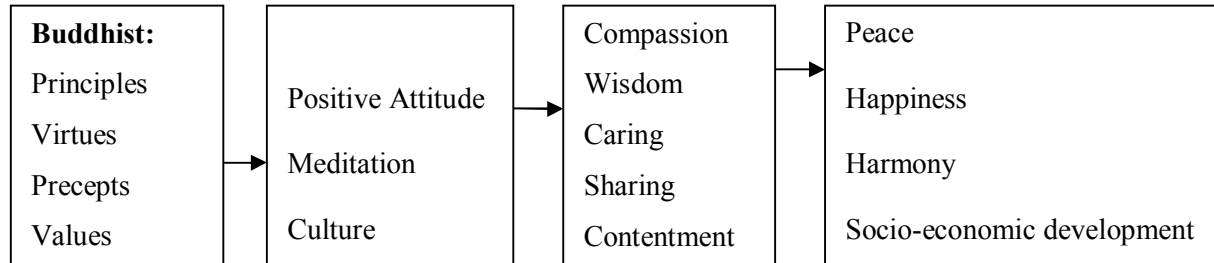


Emphasis on spirituality and its impact on the Social and economic development in the society.

In the case of spiritualistic society, as shown in fig.2 the charioteer (spirituality) reigns in which society ensue Buddhist virtues, precepts and principles. This gives rise to compassion, wisdom, caring, sharing and contentment and eventually preserve peace,

happiness, harmony and socio-economic equality in the society. In this case, there is a strong relationship between the spirituality, social and economic development facets which signifies that they co-exist and go-together. The fig.2a shows the intricacies of spiritualistic society.

Fig. 2a Spiritualistic focused society



Suttas on spirituality and socio-economic development

The pillars of establishing social development (co-operation, justice, equity, human rights, gender equality, social harmony, empowerment of the weakest) and economic development (standard of living, surplus) and equalities are elucidated in the suttas. Buddha explained the ways to earn and share the wealth virtuously and trail the path of spirituality to establish peace, harmony, equanimity and socio-economic equalities in the society.

In Buddhism, the spiritual health and material well being are not enemies but they are natural allies and go together. In the *Mahanidana and Kalahavivada suttas* (Digha Nikaya, 1) social sufferings is analyzed from a spiritual view point. It shows that because of craving all sufferings and social disruptive struggle originate. In the *Kosambiya Sutta* Buddha has stated that wealth has to be collectively shared rather than individually, as otherwise poverty spreads (Majjhima Nikaya, 1). This does not mean that ignoring of one's own wishes for the sake of other's needs; rather it is caring for both oneself and of other's needs. In the *Dwichakku sutta* (Anguttara Nikaya, 1) it is discoursed that human happiness cannot be achieved either by spiritual uplift or material advancement alone, and that both these aspects are to be equally developed to acquire happiness. The Buddha has discoursed about a dwichakku (two eyed person) among ordinary people; this person uses the first eye to acquire wealth and to improve such acquired wealth. His second eye he uses for spiritual development. This shows that a two-eyed person is superior to one, having either the first eye or the second eye only. This shows that spiritual development alone or material development alone is not adequate to lead a happy life, both are important. This suggests that the most of the socio-economic problems of the day is the eradication of craving. It is said in the *Vyaggapajja Sutta* (Sanutta Nikaya, 1), that a person must earn his wealth through righteous means through diligence, prudent and competent. If the people resort to use wealth exclusively for their personal satisfaction without sharing, such a society makes way for the creation of hatred, ill will, jealousy and commotion. The *Cakkavattisihanada-sutta* of the Digha-nikaya (No.26) clearly states that poverty is the cause of immorality and crimes such as theft, falsehood, violence, hatred, cruelty, etc. Kings in ancient times, like governments today tried to suppress crime through punishment. The *Kutadanta-sutta* of the same Nikaya explains how futile this is.

It says that this method can never be successful. Instead the Buddha suggests that, in order to eradicate crime, the economic condition of the people should be improved: grain and other facilities for agriculture should be provided for farmers and cultivators; capital should be provided for traders and those engaged in business; adequate wages should be paid to those who are employed. When people are thus provided for with opportunities for earning a sufficient income, they will be contented, will have no fear or anxiety, and consequently the country will be peaceful and free from crime. It is stated in the *Sigalovada Sutta* (Digha Nikaya, 3) that one gathers wealth little by little as bees collect honey. Such accumulated wealth should be divided into four parts: One part for day-to-day expenses, two parts for investment, and the balance to be kept as precautions against contingencies. It is possible once the Buddhist concept of consumption is practiced, conspicuous consumption will be minimized and hence restricting consumption to one fourth of income would be feasible. In the *Sabbasava Sutta* (Anguttara Nikaya, 4) - the objectives and rationale behind consumption of items like clothes, food, shelter and medicine are enumerated. Buddhism is against the lustful attachment towards insatiable things. Consumption according to Buddhism is not the final goal of a society. It serves another objective if taken in proper perspective (without craving towards them); it permits achievement of the higher state of nirvana.

Applications of Buddhist precepts, principles and virtues:

In countries like Thailand, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and others, one can come across the application of Buddhist precepts, principles and virtues to improve the socio-economic conditions in the society. Based on Buddhist philosophy, some models have been developed and deployed, which are rather country-specific, for the purpose of social and economic development. Also, in the recent years there is an emergence of some global initiatives to address the socio-economic problems of most vulnerable members of the society and there are cases of individuals who are making extraordinary efforts in their own ways, like Chen Shu-Chu, a vegetable vendor from Taiwan to the cause of social and economic development of most vulnerable people of the society. These are elucidated below:

Thailand:

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej developed the philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy to lead his people to a balanced way of life and to be the main sustainable development theory for the country. The Self Sufficiency Economy and its expected outcomes as His Majesty stated “Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy that guides the livelihood and behavior of people at all levels, family to the community to the country, on matters concerning national development and administration. It calls for a ‘middle way’ to be observed, especially in pursuing economic development in keeping with the world of globalization. At the same time the philosophy emphasizes to build up the spiritual foundation of all people in the nation, especially state officials, scholars, and business people at all levels, so they are conscious of moral integrity and honesty and they strive for the appropriate wisdom to live life with forbearance, diligence, self-awareness, intelligence, and attentiveness. In this way it can be hoped to maintain balance and be ready to cope with rapid physical, social, environmental, and cultural changes from the outside world.”

“Sufficiency” means living in moderation and being self-reliant in order to protect against internal and external changes. To achieve this, an application of knowledge with due consideration and prudence is essential. His Majesty has recommended a secure

balance in the five following aspects to achieve the principle of self-reliance: (i) State of Mind: One should be strong, self-reliant, compassionate and flexible. Besides, one should possess a good conscience and place public interests as a higher priority than one's own (ii) Social Affairs: People should help one another, strengthen the community, maintain unity and develop a learning process that stems from a stable foundation (iii) Natural Resource and Environmental Management: The country's resources need to be used efficiently and carefully to create sustainable benefits and to develop the nation's stability progressively (iv) Technology: Technological development should be used appropriately while encouraging new developments to come from the villagers' local wisdom (v) Economic Affairs: One needs to increase earnings, reduce expenses, and pursue a decent life.

As His Majesty has stated, "If we contain our wants, with less greed, we would be less belligerent towards others. If all countries entertain this - this is not an economic system - the idea that we all should be self-sufficient, which implies moderation, not to the extreme, not blinded with greed, we can all live happily."

The Sufficiency Economy is believed to adapt well within existing social and cultural structures in a given community, if the following two factors are met: (i) subsistence production with equitable linkage between production/consumption (ii) the community has the potential to manage its own resources - as a result, the Sufficiency Economy should enable the community to maintain adequate population size, enable proper technology usage, preserve the richness of the ecosystems and survive without the necessity of intervention from external factors. The concept is now commonly included in many government projects. The philosophy is applicable to people from all walks of life and at all levels. ((Sunai Setboonsarng, 2007).

Bhutan:

King Jigme Singye Wangchuk propounded the philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) rather than Gross national Product. This alternative development strategy is used to balance material growth with cultural, ecological and psychological well-being. GNH philosophy has triggered world-wide movement and also it has become Bhutan's greatest USP. GNH surveys are conducted scientifically to measure well-being and happiness: psychological and well-being, balanced time use, community vitality, cultural diversity and resilience, ecological diversity and resilience, good governance, living standard, health and education. This philosophy emphasizes that happiness is important and can be achieved by controlling one's desires and greed, and balancing material growth with spiritual growth (Sheela Reddy, 2010). GNH has brought changes in the lives of Bhutan people-the following cases illustrate the point: One schoolgirl stopped wearing gold earrings to avoid becoming envy among her classmates as many could not afford it; another schoolboy said GNH had awakened interest in his extended family, and now he visits adjoining valley to meet his relatives.

Sri Lanka:

The Sarvodaya movement of Sri Lanka had its beginnings in 1958, when A T Ariyaratne, who was then a teacher at a leading Buddhist school in Colombo, organized some teachers and students of the school to work as volunteers in a backward village called Kanatoluwa. Ariyaratne describes the first experiment of the gift of labour or the sharing of labour, which became the key concept and practical device in the Sarvodaya scheme of development is elucidated herein - They sank wells, dug, latrine pits, cleared home gardens and planted various crops, inaugurated a formal educational programme,

organized literacy classes for adults, conducted health lessons and demonstrations, child and mentality care work, singing and dancing classes, and that even established a place for religious worship for the people.

Sarvodaya's philosophy is derived from Buddhism. It is based on Buddha's ideas of self-reliance and of compassion. Shramadana is the chief instrument through which Sarvodaya attempts to achieve its development goal. The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement shows how religion and spirituality can serve as a basic resource in development. Development is connected to one's 'awakening' and inner growth, leading to social and economic changes. The following Buddhist concepts are used in this work: *Dana* or 'the giving of alms' was further interpreted to include 'giving of one's time and skills and energy for the good of the community', giving in any form is encouraged for example the rich farmer is encouraged to donate his land for road building or a skilled worker is encouraged to donate his skills; *Karuna* or 'compassion' which implies facing our anger and hatred; *Priyavachan* or 'pleasant speech' to promote respect and a sense of equality and create wholesome relationship; *Samanatmatha* or 'social equality', Ariyaratne started his movement in a poor outcaste village reminding the villagers that discrimination is a moral outrage, rejected by Buddha himself; *Arthacharya* or 'constructive work', in the Shramadana camps labour is shared, and all involved are awakened to their potential of self-reliance; *Muditha* or 'joy in the joy of others'; *Upekka* or 'equanimity' doing one's duty without being concerned about the result success or failure.

Taiwan:

Chen Shu-Chu from Taiwan aged about 60, is a generous woman. Chen Shu-Chu case illustrates the pathway of leading a spiritual life in reality and it demonstrates spirituality-in-action – being selfless, caring, sharing and showing compassion towards the most vulnerable section of the society. She is a vegetable vendor and has donated nearly NT\$10 million (more than US\$ 333,000) from such a humble income from vegetable business towards various charitable causes, including schools, orphanages and poor children. Chen quoted once "I do not place great importance on money. When I donate to help others, I feel at peace, I'm happy, and I can sleep well at night". Chen leads a very simple life without any luxuries. Her day starts at morning 3am. Neither does she have any desire for material gains nor any form of enjoyment. All she needs is food (rice and noodles) and a place to sleep. She buys clothes from roadside stalls. Her daily vegetarian food cost little. She sleeps on the hard floor. This made her to save large sums of money and donate to the noble cause. Chen Shu-Chu gives a noble advice on how to save for the philanthropic cause "spend only what you need, and you will be able to save a lot". This extraordinary woman thinks nothing of a living a life devoid of luxuries in order to help those less fortunate than herself (Esther Lians, 2010).

Spiritual approach at global level

Today there are more and more Individuals, Institutions, corporations, are involving themselves to build a better society and improve socio-economic conditions around the world. The significant development in the recent times is the contributions of organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Clinton Global Initiative (CGI), Ford Foundation and so on to address global problems that are ignored by governments and other organizations - to reduce poverty and injustice, improve the standard of education, better health care, economic and social wellbeing, natural resources and sustainable development, agriculture, to strengthen democratic values, and

others. CGI programs have helped nearly 300 million people in 170 nations gain better access to health care, safe drinking water, and job training. Bill Clinton once quoted: “Take some part of your life to do something for other people because the world is interdependent, and it’s too unequal and too unstable” (Carl M. Cannon, 2010); the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives, in developing countries it focuses on improving people’s health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty (<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/about/Pages/foundation-fact-sheet.aspx>); the Ford Foundation support programs to enable people to improve their lives and reinforce their commitment to society in more than 50 countries.

Establishment of Tony Blair Faith Foundation by the former British premier towards promotion and strengthening of Interfaith Solidarity across the globe and to tackle global poverty and disease. The Foundation helps bring people together who believe in inter-religious harmony, and whatever belief people hold dear to them, to work together on areas of common concern. This helps to make things happen and respect and understanding grows among the people (Tony Blair, 2011). United Nation observes first week of every February as the World Interfaith Harmony Week to build understanding and provide unity and strength to the cause of Interfaith Solidarity. The UN resolution includes everyone in the world of all religions, faiths and beliefs, and those of no religion. For the future peace to subsist in the world it has established some absolutes for future peace: moral behavior, right conduct, compassion non-violence and love of the good and love for one’s neighbor.

Bilal Rajan, the 13 year old Canadian, has worked to ease the suffering of poor children around the globe. He has raised millions of dollars for children’s causes. Bilal first learnt the value of helping other poor children when he was four. It started with a photo of utter destruction caused by earthquake in Bhuj, India. He could imagine the suffering of children without parents. At that young age onwards, he started to raise funds (through selling of fruits, cookies, and other items) to donate to UNICEF, to help Haitians affected by a hurricane and tsunami and HIV/AIDS orphans in Africa. He points out that, “Giving is the greatest reward. That’s how it feels to me. I’ve never felt better than when I make a difference”. He has partnered with web entrepreneur to launch a Sudoku website for kids. The site – sudokuhub.com – raises funds through advertising, with all the revenue going to UN’s World Food Program. Bilal quoted once “Poverty should not happen because someone is born into a different family” (Christine Langlois, 2010).

Conclusion:

There has been increasing inequality both within and across countries. Progress has varied and people in some regions have experienced periods of regress. The root cause for sufferings and socio-economic inequalities lies in craving, which is a characteristic of a materialistic society. And eventually craving leads to greed and suffering, the reality of materialistic society. This results in increasing gap between the rich and the poor, imbalanced social structure and sufferings. The answer to most of the socio-economic problems of the day is the eradication of craving through embracing Buddhist virtues, precepts, principles and Buddhist economics. The Noble Eightfold path is the driving force of Buddhist economics. In Buddhism, the spirituality and the socio-economic development go together. Buddhism’s middle path balances both spiritual and materialism to lead a contented life without harming others interests on the principles of sharing and caring for the welfare of the society. The chariot model of holistic

development implies that the spirituality would guide the humanity to establish socio-economic equality and development and strives to achieve a balance. If, there is more emphasis on materialistic development, it would lead to social and economic problems as it is widely evident in the today's world, due to more and more craving and greed. Similarly, if there is an emphasis only on spirituality development alone then there would be no material progress, and this condition would lead to poverty, health and deteriorate standard of living. This shows that spiritual development alone or material development alone is not adequate to lead a happy life, both are important. The Buddhist virtues, precepts principles and values help in establishing harmony of spiritual and material side of life, leading to socio-economic equality and development.

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