

## Globalization vis-à-vis Buddhist Social, Economical and Political Concerns

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### Introduction:

Globalization is not absolutely new phenomena occurred in the modern times but it took place in ancient times also. The scholars like Andre Gunder Frank, an economist associated with dependency theory have argued that a form of globalization has been in existence since the rise of trade links between Sumer and the Indus Valley Civilization in the third millennium B.C.<sup>1</sup> An early form of globalization is perceived in the trade links between the Roman Empire, the Parthian Empire, and the Han Dynasty. The increasing articulation of commercial links between these powers inspired the development of the Silk Road, which started in western China, reached the boundaries of the Parthian empire, and continued onwards towards Rome. This trend continued till the modern age of globalization, since World War II, is largely the result of planning by politicians to break down borders hampering trade to increase prosperity and interdependence thereby decreasing the chance of future war. Their work led to the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, commonly known as Bretton Woods conference, held at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, United States in July, 1944. The result was an agreement by the world's leading politicians to lay down the framework for international commerce and finance, and the founding of several international institutions intended to oversee the processes of globalization.<sup>2</sup> Globalization gives companies access to wider markets and consumer access to a greater variety of goods and services.

Something wrong has been realized regarding present methods of implementation of globalization seeing that the benefits of globalization are not always shared by all of the parties involved in trade. Unfortunately, developing countries, which need the potential benefits of globalization the most, are often the losers in the entire functioning of globalization. "The downside of global capitalism is the disruption of whole societies, from financial meltdowns to practices by multinationals that would never be tolerated in the West," the *Business Week* article noted. "Industrialized countries have enacted all sorts of worker, consumer, and environmental safeguards since the turn of the century, and civil rights have a strong tradition. But the global economy is pretty much still in the robber-baron age."<sup>3</sup> Economic globalization is opposed by many people because the effects of the globalization of business and trade are often disastrous for the underdeveloped nations. These nations provide the raw materials and cheap labor which are necessary to make globalization prosperous for the more developed nations. The process of globalization is successfully moving forward with the passing time but conflicts and instability are also intensifying in the same proportion in society. Poverty-stricken and underdeveloped nations which have been suffering from the debt, internal conflicts, poverty, droughts and famines look eagerly for their own space in the era of liberalized economy but they find themselves helpless seeing the benefits of only multinational companies situated in the rich countries. Another change is felt in the

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1. Andre Gunder Frank, *Reorient: Global economy in the Asian age* ( U.C.: Berkeley Press, 1998)

2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globalization> (Accessed on Nov. 9, 2009)

3. "Globalization: Lessons Learned." *Business Week*. November 6, 2000

form of homogenization of culture by the globalization of culture. Local culture; ways of living, treatment and medication, food habits, clothing etc; social traditional relations and family values appear endangered in the many societies with the introduction of more attractively packaged trends from the wealthy countries

### **Where Buddhist Principles Stand:**

The issue of globalization can be evaluated in several terms, mainly social, economical and political. The author of the present paper has made a humble attempt to present his views in the following lines considering the aforementioned divisions. Further, certain observations are made on how, paradoxically, the relevance of Buddha and Buddhism is being projected differently by some people in order to seek quick popularity and money in rat-race age of globalization.

### **Social Perspective:**

The wheel of globalization has come to the point where every human being, its relation to his family and society is being converted into a form of the relation which happens to be that of a shop-keeper and customer. The prime objective of the market strategy makers working for the leading industrial groups have to make the common person realize that the things he or she is using are out – dated, old one and need to be replaced by more advanced one. The whole struggle is not between the producer and consumer but between greed – enhancers and our minds. Creating dissatisfaction regarding wealth and success and craving for “more and more, better and better” is the mantra of global business players. The understanding of the Buddha’s teachings of the Noble Truths has become more relevant today as we neither can control the direction of the market nor its rulers. Comprehending that inner peace can never be achieved by the purchase of unlimited external objects and endless race to obtain more and more is nothing but ignorance is extremely important to combat with the problems generated by the open market system. Uncontrolled craving always ends up with dissatisfaction and hinders one’s inner development. It creates conflict and disharmony in society through the resentment of the underprivileged who feel themselves exploited by the effects of unrestrained craving.

The Buddha’s thought of the certain economic and ethical ideas for the lay persons that will remain always relevant to lead a successful family and social life. The relevancy of those ideas is amplified in the present situation as the subjects of temptation have grown enormously before us with the economic globalization. For the Buddha, the meaning of the happiness is different from what is being projected today by the market runners. He says:

*“Four conditions conduce to a householder’s weal and happiness in this very life. Which four? The accomplishment of persistent effort (utthāna-sampadā), the accomplishment of watchfulness (āraṅkha-sampadā), good friendship (kalyāṅ amittatā) and balanced livelihood (sama-jivikatā).”<sup>4</sup>*

It should be born in the mind that the Buddha does not ignore the importance of sufficient financial support in order to lead a happy householder life but, at the same time, he reminds us that there are a few other factors which must be existent in the life to make it an ideal life. The first happiness is to enjoy economic security or sufficient wealth acquired by just and righteous means (*atthi-sukha*); the second is spending that wealth liberally on himself, his family, his friends and relatives, and on meritorious deeds (*bhoga-sukha*); the third to be free from debts (*anaṅga-sukha*); the

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4. *Vyāghrapajja Sutta*, Aṅguttara Nikāya, 8.54

fourth happiness is to love a faultless, and a pure life without committing evil in thought, word or deed (*anavajja-sukha*).<sup>5</sup> Considering these principles, we should reflect carefully what we actually need in our life rather than what market wants us to believe as our need.

The process of globalization is closely connected with the increasing industrialization causing severe crisis to environment and created cut-throat competition to leave others behind bringing about the sharp rise in mental and physical diseases. The increasing rate of suicide by the already successful and wealthy men and women and rapidly growing cases of mental cases, blood pressure, heart problems are the gifts of globalization to us. The Buddha's teachings of mind-control and techniques of meditation can be extremely helpful to overcome these problems but one should not forget that the very first and basic requirement of all the three steps to achieve complete bliss is *Sīla* i.e. morality which itself has become endangered in the glamour and glitter of the market. In this present form of globalization, there appears to be just one way flow of cultural elements rather than exchange and healthy interaction. Today, the relation of rich and poor countries is not that of mutual exchange of cultures but of influencer and influenced. Another change brought by globalization is massive spread in the attitude of hypocrisy, show and pump and demonstration of power and money. This mind-set has entirely changed the way of life of all the sections. The evaluation parameter of human being has become brands and things one owns instead of his qualities. In the country like India, on the one hand, money and power has given birth to a new cast system and, on the other hand, one's own feelings of having less wealth lie more in relation to what others have rather than actually owned wealth. And such situation only increases jealousy, hatred, greed and craving in the society which is really a dreadful sign for any civilization.

### **Economical Perspective:**

As the economy governs every aspect of our lives whether it is political or social, it would not be unjustified to begin the whole issue contemplating the economical perspective. The statement of David Korten - "We do not have a globalized economy because of some historical inevitability. We have it because a small group of people who have enormous political and economic power chose to advance their narrow and short-term economic interest through a concerted, well-organized and well-funded effort to rewrite the rules of the market to make it happen."<sup>6</sup>, does not seem to be wrong when we look into a simple data of human development in the world. Recent trends of the Human Development Report of United Nations Development Program roughly illustrate that 20 % of the richest people of the world own the 82.7 % GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the world, the second 20 % of the richest people own 11.7 % of GDP and the poorest 20 % people of the world have to maintain their lives with only 1.2 % GDP of the world.<sup>7</sup> The simple data provides the picture of sheer inequality and compels us to reflect on where and what is wrong with the distribution of the capital in the whole world. Taking the example of India, if we believe the remarks of a few experts then we will have to think that the cause of exceptionally lower production of the edible food items resulting in the extra – ordinary price hike of the things in India is nothing but the result of the governments giving over emphasis to the welfare of the industrial groups

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5. Walpol Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York :Grove Press, 1974), p. 83

6. David C. Korten, "The Failure of Bretton Woods" in *The Case against the Global Economy: And for a Turn to the Local*, edited by Jerry Mander & Edward Goldsmith (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), p.24

7. *What Globalization does to Peoples Health* (Chennai :Jan Swasthya Sabha, , 2000), p.2

by providing them even the farming lands for SEZ (Special Economic Zone) rather than thinking of the common people.<sup>8</sup>

Can globalization itself as a concept be considered a wrong concept or is the handling of the concept wrong? - It is the crux of the whole issue. Buddhism is, and cannot be the contrary to the basic principle of the globalization as far if we evaluate the concept of globalization in its encyclopedic sense. Observing the basic motto of globalization in the form of the reduction and removal of the barriers between the national borders and projection of the world as a family where everyone can sell its product to the people of the other land and establish the relation with their society cannot be against the basic principles of the Buddhism namely *Paticcasamuppāda* (Theory of Interdependence). Buddhism and its role in the modern world is affected by the way people understand the nature of their lives. As a spiritual perspective, the principle of interdependence is a positive teaching aimed at curbing our deep-rooted egoism. It teaches that we cannot live simply for ourselves or without regard to others who make our lives possible. If Buddhism promotes the principle of interdependence which is a fundamental truth of life, it must also promote the principle of equality and justice, together with the rule of law for all participants in this process. It is not simply the interdependence between people. It is the interdependence of causation. It refers to the twelve link chain of causation which describes the conditions that give rise to sentient being in the process of rebirth. It is also the basis for understanding the way to attain nirvana and spiritual emancipation. The forward movement of these links indicates the way that our passions and ignorance produce the sufferings of life, noted in the first truth that life is suffering. The reverse movement of the chain suggests that the removal of the various causes in the series is the way to escape rebirth and attain nirvana. In the context of the issue of globalization, beyond the actual interdependence among peoples that human life requires, it also means that whatever principles, policies and actions that are promoted have their resulting effects. When something happens in our world, it must be seen in context of the interactions of the various parties in the situation. The Buddhist principle of interdependent causation means that we cannot simply decide issues as black and white, seeking to pin blame on one party or another. Nothing happens in a vacuum. When we recognize the complexity of causation that produces conflicts and suffering, we must treat each party to the problem equally and fairly. We must clarify the issues that will lead to reconciliation and the solution to the problem.

Actually, Buddhism does not seem to think ever in its history in the terms of geographical, cultural, political or linguistic barrier and has benefited a lot by its open – minded and liberal attitude. But when we have to think the issue of globalization, we will have to consider the way it has been implemented in the modern world and carefully watch the motifs lying behind its implementation by the certain countries who are the greatest advocate of more and more countries to adopt the policies of globalization, willingly or unwillingly. As an ordinary human being what I have perceived regarding the influence of globalization is that the biggest contribution of globalization will be remembered by the generations to come that it made the craving and desires intensified globally and here comes the role of the Buddha's way to learn from.

### **Political Perspective:**

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8. Shiva Khera, *Hindustan News Paper*, February 7, 2010, p.6

The leading multinational companies have not only captured the minds of common people in their hands but also running the governments by influencing the policies prepared by the bureaucrats and political leaders. In India, we have seen the instances of behavior of this new form of capitalism in the cities like Gurgaon (torture of its employees by the Honda Company) and Singur and Nadigram (by Tata Company). As is mentioned before in the case of SEZ, policies being implemented by the governments are not for the sake of people's welfare but for the welfare of the industrial groups mostly. These incidents of atrocities held on the common people by the government to help the industrial groups leave us thinking sincerely on what the state actually is meant for.

It reminds us the Buddha's expectations from the ruling authorities into the form of ten duties. Buddha says that the welfare of the people and nations is protected only if the kings (in the modern context we may understand it in the form of government or the international agencies that are bestowed the power to take care of all the nations and people without fear or favor) are endowed with the following ten qualities<sup>9</sup>:

1. **Dāna** – liberality, generosity, charity. The ruler should not have craving and attachment for wealth and property, but should give it away for the welfare of the people.
2. **Sīla** – a high and moral character. He should never destroy life, cheat, steal and exploit others, commit adultery, utter falsehood, or take intoxicating drinks.
3. **Pariccāga** – sacrificing everything for the good of the people. He must be prepared to give up all personal comfort, name and fame, and even his life, in the interest of the people.
4. **Ajjava** – honesty and integrity. He must be free from fear and favor in the discharge of his duties, must be sincere in his intentions, and must not deceive the public.
5. **Maddava** – kindness and gentleness. He must possess a genial temperament.
6. **Tapa** – austerity of habits. He must lead a simple life, and should not indulge in a life of luxury. He must have self-control.
7. **Akkodha** – freedom from envy, ill-will, enmity. He should bear no grudge against anybody.
8. **Avihiṅsā** – non-violence, which means not only that he should harm nobody, but that he should try to promote peace by avoiding and preventing war, and everything which involves violence and destruction of life.
9. **Khanti** – patience, forbearance, tolerance, understanding. He must be able to bear hardships, difficulties and insults without losing his temper.
10. **Avirodha** – non-opposition, non-obstruction, that is to say that he should not oppose the will of the people, should not obstruct any measures that are conducive to the welfare of the people. In other words he should rule in harmony with his people.

The policy to make the process of globalization successful is designed in such a way that the developing countries are deceived by the external glitter of assuming that they are developing rapidly and becoming modern day by day, but the statistics narrate the opposite story. The agencies like World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund) are structurally undemocratic and entangled in the jaws of certain powerful countries make sure that the interests of these countries are safe

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9. Walpol Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York :Grove Press, 1974), p.85

and sustainable. Voting power does not operate on one vote one country but is determined by the amount of money invested by each member country. While more than 150 countries are members of the IMF, five of them (USA, Britain, Germany, France and Japan) control 44% of the votes. The USA alone controls 19% of the vote. In the case of the World Bank, the 24 OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries control more than two thirds of the votes.<sup>10</sup> Clearly this gives the rich countries a great deal of power and leads our earth towards a huge inequality between the already rich and poor. Can we consider this as the policy of equality and friendliness? The Buddha, describing a good friend, says:

*“One who is a helpmate, who is the same in happiness and sorrow, who gives good counsel, he who sympathizes... becomes a refuge when you are in danger..., etc.”*<sup>11</sup>

Can poor countries expect this kind of friendship from rich countries and the above agencies? If not, then the policies of the global economy are framed for whose benefit? – It is the biggest question. The Buddha’s theory of interdependence stands against the way rich countries are using it to exploit the poor countries for their vested interests asserting the necessity of interdependence of all the countries in the global economy because here, this theory is being propagated just to dig a deeper gap between those who are already rich and poor.

Buddhist Noble Truths are not just a method of knowing the origination of suffering and its extinction but a tremendous method of the analysis of any issue also. The problems generated from the globalization may also be understood in the same way. Let’s take an example of the two ways of solving the same problem. If you have an extremely tense mind full of irritating thoughts and you desperately want to get rid of those thoughts by the help of the music, you have two options – First, to switch on the extremely loud music in order to divert your mind from those thoughts somehow and second, to listen a mild, melodious, calm and serene music to allow your tensions to settle down in a few moments. Similarly, if one has to gratify his desires, he has two options: either to fulfill those desires incessantly but the end will never come or to train the mind to control those desires. Clearly, the former is an escapist way of solving the problems whereas; the latter is the proper method of treatment. Buddhism endorses the second way of handling the problems and shows the path of treatment of the problems by suggesting the control of desires whereas globalization leads us towards the dangerous path of greed, hatred and delusion that ends nowhere but in the life shrouded with dissatisfaction, frustration and depression.

### **Changing Patterns of Religiosity in the age of Globalization:**

The waves of globalization have influenced the different societies in the different ways. Taking the example of India, I would like to submit humbly that the factor which is benefited most by the globalization is the business of religion. In the Indian economy, one of the best selling products today is religion. The never-ending passion to achieve more success and money is bringing, sooner or later, suffering to many people and, as much as suffering increases, as much as the market of gods, deities, self-proclaimed gods and astrologers flourishes. People are spending huge amount of their earnings on the traditional blind faiths, rituals, astrologers, numerologists, tarot card readers and gem stones etc. to fix their planets in the right order so that they could buy the happiness and prosperity from the gods. The religious organizations that are thriving by these donations are spending to erect the temples at

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10. *What Globalization does to Peoples Health*, (Chennai :Jan Swasthya Sabha, 2000), p.7

11. *Sigālovāda Sutta*, Dīgha Nikāya, 31

every corner, in the names of not only gods worshipped from ancient times but are also creating new gods in order to make their business more prospering.

If we talk in the terms of the Buddhism in the world, I would make a humble submission here that the historical Gotama Buddha also would not have imagined the way of relevance of Him as is being projected by the certain Buddhist monks and organizations. Recently, I received an advertisement through e-mail to join a camp organized by a Buddhist monk. It was claimed in the advertisement that the monk who is hosting the program was diagnosed with diabetes a month back and with the help of Buddhist mantras and meditation; he became absolutely free of the disease in just 28 days. The emphasis was on the mantras. One had to pay a good sum of money to join the camp. The claim was nothing but a gimmick to bring more a more people to the camp, not to learn pure meditation but to get cured of different diseases, as anybody would expect when he goes to any of the best hospitals. Had Shakyamuni propounded the same form of Dhamma as is being illustrated in such ads, certainly, Buddhism would have not even taken birth in the contemporary Indian society as there was already stronger and older tradition of mantra – reciting, ritualism and orthodoxy in the form of Brahmanism existent in the then society. The Buddha, himself has said innumerable times the words like:

*Paying regard to wrath, hypocrisy to gain and honors, like a rotten seed in good soil sown, a monk can make no growth. They who have lived and do live honoring the true Dhamma, - such do grow indeed in the Dhamma, As, after use of oil, drugs have more power.*<sup>12</sup>

The Buddha had perceived the problems of the contemporary society and propounded the certain doctrines to combat them. The major one of those problems was hypocrisy and superstitions in the name of religion and the very same problem can be seen in the Buddhist society nowadays. The Buddha's teachings are all about to combat the hypocrisy of life whether it is social or religious. He was against even the exhibition of six transcendental powers (*Abhiññā*). The Pali literature is full of such references which show the Buddha's disagreement with the demonstration of magical power in order to obtain fame and money. The Buddha called those skills as pseudo – science or low art (*Tiracchāna Vijjā*).<sup>13</sup>

In the race of the cashing the name of the Buddha in order to collect the huge revenue from tourism, the Government of India is not far behind. On the one hand, the Pali and Buddhist studies are desperately struggling to survive as a discipline of study in the country but on the other hand, the governments is spending a huge amount of money to attract the tourists from the Buddhist countries because it can bring back the money in multiplied form by the revenue generated from the foreign tourists. The name of the Buddha is being used even for the nuclear bomb test with the slogan of “Smiling Buddha” and for the political nexus also by the Hindu fundamentalist groups as a tool. Ironically, the Buddha has become a selling commodity in the age of globalization. If you participate in the *Buddha Mahotsava*, an event being organized

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12 . F.L. Woodward, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara Nikāya)*, Vol. II (London: Pali Text Society, 1973), p.55

13. *Brahmajāla Sutta*, Dīgha Nikāya, 1

by the various state governments of India nowadays on the day of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and *Mahāparinibbāna (Vesak Purnima)*, you will find that the Buddha and Buddhist ideas itself are absent from the entire event. The whole occasion appears more like a ruling political party's own program where there is neither any concern with the Buddha's teachings nor is any scope of proper participation of the true scholars.

Relevance is not an objective term free from the time and space. Everything changes the nature of its relevance and applicability in the different time and space. Had the Buddha not understood this fact, He would never have allowed His disciples to change or modify the rules of *Vinaya*, in the future. The philosophy of the Buddha accepts the impermanence as a fact, and therefore, is free from the rigidity of even the claim of eternal relevance also of each and every saying of the *Tipiṅka*. The Buddha never claimed himself as a God and that suggests that we do not need to wait for any supernatural to come to shield us from our problems. If we take a look of the history of Buddhism, it is evident that Buddhism has changed its form many times depending on the land and its local culture and beliefs. These changes cannot, and perhaps should not, be put into the category of right or wrong but rather we should accept that this change had to happen inevitably. The change is the biggest virtue of any living society or thought and Buddhism has this capacity all the time. The system which never put insistence even on the dialect of its learning, never categorized the caste or community for its learning, and even rejected the deterministic attitude of any religion, had to change. Such a liberal philosophy cannot be against the interaction of the people, societies and nations. Therefore, Buddhist principle does not oppose the thought behind the process of globalization and if opened economic borders are exploring a wide arena of the technological advancement and consumer goods for every nation with the equal opportunity and justice then it may be taken in a positive way too. But, the inequality and hegemonic condition it is producing is a matter of grave concern for any true Buddhist who dreams of the absolute welfare of this cosmos.

### **Conclusion:**

If we examine carefully, the Buddhist standpoint may be placed again as a middle path between the two extremes: (1) Globalization is to be discarded entirely; (2) All that happens with the globalization should be welcomed.

Buddhism itself asserts the need for breaking the mental barriers which, resultantly breaks the social, cultural, economic and geographical barriers and such a path of life cannot be principally against globalization.

But, the humane, egalitarian approach of Buddhism sets itself against the way of the implementation of the policies of globalization which expects the poorer countries to open their markets for rich countries without giving any protection to the indigenous industries, whereas the rich countries advocate the policy of protectionism for their own productions. The Buddhist theory of skillful means shows the path of adopting different mode of the treatment understanding the nature of the different problems. Following the same theory, ideally, those poor countries need to be given the power to protect the local indigenous industry but the things are actually the opposite. In such a situation, the Buddhist principles cannot be in favor of the modern implementation of the policies of the globalization.

It would be irrational and unscientific to search the lines describing solution for all the modern problems caused by the economic globalization in the Buddha's teachings. The nature of the problems changes with the time and space and one has to



look wisely into the Buddhist principles of how those are compatible in their subtle forms to address the modern problems caused by globalization. The Buddha delivered his teachings understanding the levels of human mind and its conditions rather than external circumstances. But amidst all the debates of the pros and cons of globalization, this fact remains unchanged forever that without curbing our desires, inner and outer peace is not possible at all.

There should be serious concern not only how the Buddhist doctrines take up the issue of globalization, but also how the name of the Buddha is being exploited to earn money and fame by certain monks or organizations, which also is not an independent issue from the issue of globalization. The basic theory which is working behind globalization is that how and up to what extent one knows to sell its product and the electronic medium has emerged as a major tool of this objective.

There is an ethical issue related to the religious practices which compels me to rethink on the relevance of the Buddha in the age of globalization. Every one is running endlessly to find a short cut, whether it is the common people or saffron dressed monks. Is it appropriate to sell the Buddha's name in the same way as multinational companies are selling their products? Rationality, which was once the greatest virtue of Buddhism, seems to have become biggest impediment in the propagation of Buddhism in the age of globalization. Why? This is the time to think about it. The biggest question here emerges before us, which Buddha is our Buddha, Gotama, the Buddha who inspires us to attain enlightenment by leading the life of morality, concentration and wisdom or another magical, miraculous God like Buddha who is easily saleable by the wrong claims. Let's not exploit the Buddha's name to proclaim those ideas against which Buddha struggled throughout his life on the Indian soil.