

# The Value of Ethical Basis Depicted in Buddhism for a Sound Economy

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Buddhism and Economics, being subjected to many discussions and many researches have being conducted on these by the Buddhist scholars and the economists. Here, it is quite doubtful whether there is anything left out to be discussed further. But, when the behavioural patterns and social phenomena are taken into consideration, it seems that despite all the researches that have been conducted, the issues of these fields remain still unsolved. The reason adduces for this is that the current society is not a place where morality is concerned.

As we are living in a society, we depend on each other. No one can stay alone. As a result of that, we have to face serious conflicts so as to keep our wealth protected. When the man tries to keep his wealth protected because of his craving for sense pleasure, there arise conflicts in the society. Mahadukkhakkhanda Sutta<sup>1</sup> states that there happen conflicts; disagreements; debates; blaming; taking arms; killings and so on between kings; Kṣatriyās (Warriors and Rulers); Brāhmins (Priests and Teachers); Gahapatis (Householders); and between mother and children; father and children; brothers and sisters; and between brothers; sisters and friends.<sup>2</sup> When Mahadukkhakkhanda Sutta states how conflicts arise in the society, Bahuvedaniya Sutta<sup>3</sup> states what should be done not to arise such situations in the society. In the Sutta, the Buddha mentioned to Ven. Ananda that He has well preached the dhamma, if the followers accept them and practice them well, they can live in a peaceful society where there is no crimes; conflicts; disagreements; and so on.<sup>4</sup> When the factors are considered there is no severe difficulty for earning wealth but the difficulty is with living peacefully.

Therefore, the first thing we should understand is that we are linked with whatever around us whether material or immaterial, or animate or inanimate. The world is like a wheel with its spokes and the hub. All the things that exist in the world, whether they are subjected or objected, should be concerned. Nothing can be neglected. When the natural phenomena are

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<sup>1</sup> M.N. Vol. i, PTS, p. 87

<sup>2</sup> *Tassa ce bhikkhave kulaputtassa evaṃ uṭṭhahato ghaṭato vāyamato te bhogā abhinipphajjanti, so tesaṃ bhogānaṃ ārakkhādhikaraṇam dukkhaṃ domanassaṃ paṭisaṇvediti: ....*

*Puna na paraṃ bhikkhave kāmahetu kāmanidānaṃ kāmādhikaraṇaṃ kāmānameva hetu*

*Rājānopo rājūhi vivadati. Khattiyāpi khattiyehi vivadati. Brahmanāpi brāhmanehi vivadati. Gahapatīpi gahapatīhi vivadati. Mātāpi puttana vivadati. Puttopi mātārā vivadati. Pitāpi puttana vivadati. Bhātāpi bhātārā vivadati. Bhātāpi bhaginiyā vivadati.*

*Bhaginiyāpi bhātārā vivadati. Sahāyopi sahayena vivadati.*

*Te tattha kalahaviggahavivādāpannā aññamaññaṃ pāṇīhi upakkamanti. Leddūhi upakkamanti. Daṇḍenapi upakkamanti. Satthehi upakkamanti. Te tattha maraṇampi tigaccanti maraṇamatthampi dukkhaṃ. Ayampi bhikkhave kāmānaṃ ādīnavo...*

<sup>3</sup> M.N., Vol. I, PTS, p. 397

<sup>4</sup> *evaṃ pariyāya desito kho ānanda mayā dhamme ye aññamaññaṃ subhāsitaṃ sulapitaṃ samanujānissanti, samanumaññissanti, samanumodissanti, tesametaṃ pātikaṇkhaṇ: samaggā sammadamānā avivadamānā khīrodakībhūtā aññamaññaṃ piyacakkhūhi sampassantā viharissantīti.*

concerned, they do not do any harm to the natural occurrences. But human beings are the most harmful moving equipment that does the serious damages to the natural process of the world. Considering the human beings as the most harmful moving equipment they should be groomed. The people lived during the Indus Valley Civilization did not want to overpower the natural phenomena. Their sole aim was to survive. However, with the development of the human brain they wanted to defeat the natural phenomena that cannot ever be performed. Buddhism, considering all the human needs and all the human activities, has introduced the ethical conducts that should be performed by the individual for the sake of himself, the world and the being.

As human beings we need to lead a life of wealthy. Therefore, as the people in the society, the first thing we should understand is what wealth really is. Unless we understand the meaning of wealthy and the meaning of life, a discussion on a sound economy would be ineffective. With regard to wealth, we can put forth the following questions.

What is the wealth?

Is the money wealth?

Is the property wealth?

Is the treasury wealth?

All these are controversial. None of them could be considered wealth. However, the people live in this world believe that wealth is nothing but money, property, treasures etc. But in the canon, wealth is interpreted indifferently. For the purpose of discussing what wealth really is, I have quoted some of the facts given in various Suttas, below.

1. Sankittadhana Sutta<sup>5</sup> states Sevenfold Noble Wealth.<sup>6</sup>
2. Cakka Sutta<sup>7</sup> states Fourfold wealth.<sup>8</sup>
3. Anana Sutta<sup>9</sup> gives Fourfold Noble Wealth.<sup>10</sup>
4. Vaddhi Sutta<sup>11</sup> gives ten kinds of wealth.<sup>12</sup>
5. Dhammapada states that the Appamāda is the wealth.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Samkhittadhana Sutta, Dhanavaggo, Sattaka Nipatha, A. N. Vol. iv, BJM, p.284. /A.N., Vol. iv., PTS, p.4

<sup>6</sup> *Sattimāni Bhikkhave, dhanāni. Katamāni satta:*

*Saddhādhanaṃ, silādhanaṃ, hiridhanam, ottappadhanaṃ, sutadhanaṃ, cāgadhaṃ, paññādhanaṃ.*

*Imāni kho bhikkhave, satta dhanāni'ti.*

<sup>7</sup> Cakka Sutta, Cakka Vaggo, Cakkanipāto, Dutiyabhago, Anguttara Nikāyo, Vol. ii, p. 66/ A.N., Vol. ii., PTS, p.31

<sup>8</sup> *Patirūpadesavāso, sappurisupassayo, attasammāpanidhi, pubbe ca katapuññatā.*

*Imāni kho bhikkhave cattāri cakkāni, yehi samannāgatānaṃ devamanussānaṃ catucakkaṃ vattati, yehi samannāgatā devamanussā na cirasseva mahantattaṃ vepullattaṃ pāpuṇanti bhogesūti.*

<sup>9</sup> Anaṇa Sutta, A. N. Vol. ii, 69 / Aṅguttara Nikāya, Pattakamma Vaggo, Anaṇa Sutta, BJM, p. 130

<sup>10</sup> *Bhogā me atthi uṭṭhānaviriyādhigatā bāhābalaparicitā sedāvakkhittā dhammikā*

*dhammaladdhātī adhigacchati sukhaṃ, adhigacchati somanassaṃ, ....*

*Uṭṭhānaviriyādhigatehi bhogehi bāhābalaparicitehi sedāvakkhittēhi dhammikehi dhammaladdhehi bhoge ca bhuñjāmi puññānī ca karomīti adhigacchati sukhaṃ, adhigacchati somanassaṃ, ...*

*Na kassaci kinci dhārema appaṃ vā bahuṃ vāti adhigacchati sukhaṃ, adhigacchati somanassaṃ, ...*

*Anavajjenamhi kāyakammaṇa samannāgato, anavajjena vacīkammaṇa samannāgato, anavajjena manokammaṇa samannāgatoti adhigacchati sukhaṃ, adhigacchati somanassaṃ, ...*

<sup>11</sup> Vaddhi Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya, Vol. VI,

<sup>12</sup> *Kettavatthū, Dhanadhañña, Puttadāra, Dāsakammakarāporisa, Catuppada, Saddhā, Sila, Suta, Cāga, Paññā*

<sup>13</sup> *Pamādamanuyyujjanti – bālā dummedhino janā*

*Appamādaṃ ca medhāvī - dhanaṃ seṭṭham'va rakkhati*

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'Wealth' for the Buddha matters not only for mundane happiness but also supra-mundane happiness. Sankittadhana Sutta<sup>14</sup> in Anguttara Nikaya states Sevenfold Noble Wealth<sup>15</sup> (*saptārya dhana*).

1. *saddhā* - Faith
2. *sīla* - Virtue
3. *hiri* - Shame of Blame
4. *ottappa* - Fear of Blame
5. *suta* - Listening
6. *cāga* - Gifting
7. *paññā* - Wisdom

According to the Sutta, wealth is sevenfold. Here, in the Sutta, the Buddha has emphasised that the path to the Nibbana is the highest achievement that can be obtained by following the seven states such as *saddhā*, etc. In the initial stage we need *saddhā* to begin our journey to the final bliss. In that sense it becomes a wealth. With regard to the sevenfold noble wealth the Paññā is the final and it is the highest. Therefore, to the individual who follows the supra-mundane life these seven become the wealth.

Cakka Sutta<sup>16</sup> states Fourfold wealth<sup>17</sup> out of which three are related to the current life and the last, to the previous lives.

1. *patirūpadesavāso* - Living in a peaceful area
2. *sappurisupassayo* - Associating with worthy friends
3. *attasammāpanidhi* - Connected with profitable deeds
4. *pubbe ca katapuññatā* - Having previously done merits

Maṅgala Sutta also gives the same and the only difference that can be seen is *sappurisupassayo* which is replaced with *panditānañca sevenā*. The fourfold wealth that is given in Cakka Sutta is considerable for the attainment of the final liberation. Though these facts are directly connected with the liberation, they are even relevant for the mundane life. As long as we lead a happy mundane life, no liberation could be available. On the one hand, if the whole society is threatened by various dangers, it would not be a place for safe meditation. On the other hand, if the people have nothing to offer as daily requirements for the ascetics or monks, they (ascetics or the monks) cannot practice meditation. The great wisdom is such which cannot be obtained through starvation. The place we live in should be very peaceful with enough daily requirements, otherwise no happiness in mundane or supra-mundane could be gained.

In Sappurisa Vagga and various Suttas in Anguttara Nikaya prominence is given to the *sappurisupassayo*. This is very essential even to the mundane people. In Sigalovada Sutta different kinds of friends are introduced and the benefits that can be obtained with the

<sup>14</sup> Samkhittadhana Sutta, Dhanavaggo, Sattaka Nipatha, A. N. Vol. iv, BJM, p.284. /A.N., Vol. iv., PTS, p.4

<sup>15</sup> *Sattimāni Bhikkhave, dhanāni. Katamāni satta:*

*Saddhādhanaṃ, sīladhanaṃ, hiridhanaṃ, ottappadhanaṃ, sutadhanaṃ, cāgadhaṃ, paññādhanaṃ.*  
Imāni kho bhikkhave, satta dhanāni'ti.

<sup>16</sup> Cakka Sutta, Cakka Vaggo, Cakkanipāto, Dutiyabhago, Anguttara Nikāyo, Vol. ii, p. 66/ A.N., Vol. ii., PTS, p.31

<sup>17</sup> *Patirūpadesavāso, sappurisupassayo, attasammāpanidhi, pubbe ca katapuññatā.*

*Imāni kho bhikkhave cattāri cakkāni, yehi samannāgatānaṃ devamanussānaṃ catucakkaṃ vattati, yehi samannāgatā devamanussā na cirasseva mahantattaṃ vepullattaṃ pāpuṇanti bhogesūti.*

association of a good friend are mentioned. Since we depend on each other in the society, the friends with whom we make relationships should be carefully chosen.

According to the seeds grown, we can reap the harvest.<sup>18</sup> The results, be them profitable or unprofitable, could not be made realistic, until the plans developed in discussions are properly implemented. They should be practiced. Depending on the results we can reform, change or continue the plans. Therefore, *attasammāpanidhi* (Connected with profitable deeds) is placed next by the Buddha. Here, what we should practice is that what gives good results. In *Assalayana Sutta*<sup>19</sup> the statement made by the Buddha is applicable in this context. "Having been a master, one may become a slave, and having been a slave, one may become a master"<sup>20</sup> is the statement made by the Buddha. On the one hand, the wealth can decide the status of a man, whether he is a master or a slave. On the other hand, the occupation or the duty of the man can decide whether he is an outcast or not according to the factors given in *Vasala Sutta*<sup>21</sup>. In this regard, man should be conscious with regard to his occupation because it should be beneficial to himself and others as stated in *Ambalatthikarahulovada Sutta*<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, *attasammāpanidhi* (Connected with profitable deeds) is a substantial point to the individual in search of money. When the facts are concerned, the individual should understand what sort of occupation he should prefer. There were individuals who could not realize the correct form of occupation. As a result of that the Buddha had to emphasize kinds of occupations that should be abandoned by the *Upāsakās*. Therefore, no room is given in Buddhism to practice five kinds of abandoned occupations.<sup>23</sup> The occupations or trading abandoned by the Buddha are:

- |      |                |                   |
|------|----------------|-------------------|
| i.   | Sattha vanijjā | - selling weapons |
| ii.  | Satta vanijjā  | - selling animals |
| iii. | Mansa vanijjā  | - selling flesh   |
| iv.  | Visa vanijjā   | - selling poisons |
| v.   | Majja vanijjā  | - selling liquor  |

The fourth wealth, *Cakka Sutta* states, is *pubbe ca katapuññatā* (having previously done merits). *Mangala Sutta*<sup>24</sup> also gives *pubbe ca katapuññatā* as a fact of protection. This is confirmed with the facts mentioned in the *Cullakammavibhanga Sutta*<sup>25</sup>. This is a crucial point in this article. In economic condition no priority is given to the kamma. Here, the meaning of the term kamma is not mere action. It is the result of previously done actions. That is what it is mentioned in the *Cullakammavibhanga Sutta*. The kamma can decide whether the individual is high or low.<sup>26</sup> It is true that the kamma cannot decide the future and everything does not happen

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<sup>18</sup> Yadisam vapate bījam tādīsam harate phalam - Kalyānakārī kalyāṇam pāpakā ca pāpakam  
Isayasamuddaka Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya, Vol. I, p. 404 / S.N. Vol. I, PTS p.226

<sup>19</sup> Aiyo hutvā dāso hoti, daso hutvā iyo hoti.

<sup>20</sup> An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy, Ven. Pathegama Gnanarama, Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association, Singapore, 1996, p.76

<sup>21</sup> S.n. PTS, p. 20

<sup>22</sup> M.N. Vol.i, PTS, pp.413-419

<sup>23</sup> Pañcimā, bhikkhave, vanijjā upāsakena akaraṇīyā, katamā pañca? Sattavaṇijjā, sattavaṇijjā, maṃsavaṇijjā, majjjavaṇijjā, visavaṇijjā  
A.N. Vol. iii, PTS, p.208

<sup>24</sup> S.n., PTS, p.47

<sup>25</sup> M.N. Vol. iii, PTS, p.206

<sup>26</sup> *Kammaṃ satthe vibajati yadidan hinappanātātā*

according to the previous kamma. But kamma should not be forgotten since it has been a part of Niyama Dharmas.

Buddhism accepts the kamma and its results. Therefore, Andha Sutta (dvicakkhu)<sup>27</sup> introduces the two fold development of the individual. One is the knowledge to acquire wealth unattained and the second is to see the states that are praiseworthy. When the first directs the individual towards the financial development, the second directs him towards the moral development. Both the financial and ethical development should be balanced.

Not only the Buddha paid his attention on earning money but also on the consumption. Consumption is directly related to the ethics. Kâmbhogi Sutta<sup>28</sup> introduces ten persons involved with sense pleasure. Among them the tenth person is highlighted as the best, chief, topmost, highest and supreme. This person is praiseworthy because of the following five qualities:

- i. Seeks after wealth lawfully, not arbitrarily
- ii. Makes himself happy and cheerful
- iii. Shares his wealth with others
- iv. Does meritorious deeds
- v. Makes use of his wealth without greed and longing, without infatuation, heedful of the danger and alive to his own salvation.

In this way what he earns should be spent on himself, wife and children, parents, brothers and sisters, friends, relatives, neighbours, clergies (samana Brahmas) and the poor.

The man should live in the society happily. For the happiness of the mundane life he needs wealth. Fourfold Noble Wealth of the wordings<sup>29</sup> delivered by the Buddha to Anathapindika<sup>30</sup> states in Anana Sutta.<sup>31</sup>

1. *Atthisukha* - when a person acquires wealth by means of righteous, he has a great sense of economic security and self esteem.
2. *Bhogasukha* - the feelings that he could spent wealth as he wishes on himself, family, friends, relatives, workers and meritorious deeds
3. *Ananasukha* - the feeling that he is free from debts
4. *Anavajjasukha* - the feeling that he has a life of purity in thought, words and deeds.

When the man lives in the world with these fourfold wealth, he can experience the mundane happiness. If the man is so greedy, he cannot experience any of these. To suppress his greed, he needs to practice morality step by step. The initial method that should be followed by an individual is the Threefold Meritorious Deed.<sup>32</sup> Being dāna the first step towards the

<sup>27</sup> Andha Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya, Vol. I, PTS, p. 129

<sup>28</sup> *ayam imesam dasannam kâmbhoginam aggo ca settho ca pâmokkho ca uttamo ca pavaro ca* Kâmbhogi Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya, Vol. V, PTS, p. 177

<sup>29</sup> *Bhogā me atthi uṭṭhānaviriyādhigatā bāhābalaparicitā sedāvakkhittā dhammikā dhammaladdhātī adhigacchati sukhaṃ, adhigacchati somanassaṃ, ... Uṭṭhānaviriyādhigatehi bhogehi bāhābalaparicitehi sedāvakkhittēhi dhammikehi dhammaladdhehi bhoge ca bhuñjāmi puññānī ca karomīti adhigacchati sukhaṃ, adhigacchati somanassaṃ, ... Na kassaci kinci dhārema appaṃ vā bahuṃ vāti adhigacchati sukhaṃ, adhigacchati somanassaṃ, ... Anavajjenamhi kāyakammena samannāgato, anavajjena vacīkammena samannāgato, anavajjena manokammena samannāgatoti adhigacchati sukhaṃ, adhigacchati somanassaṃ, ...*

<sup>30</sup> Anguttara Nikaya Vol. ii, p 130 BJM

<sup>31</sup> Anaṇa Sutta, A. N. Vol. ii, PTS, p. 69 / Aṅguttaka Nikāya, Pattakamma Vaggo, Anaṇa Sutta, BJM, p. 130

<sup>32</sup> *dāna, sīla, bhāvanā*

cessation of craving, in many Suttas it is given as the first. When the Buddha introduced the consumption, He has given priority to the giving or generosity in relation to the earning. The above mentioned Suttas show that how far the Buddha has concerned the giving when he divulged the economic prosperity. *Cāga* in Sankittadhana Sutta; *Bhogasukha* in Anana Sutta; the second, third and fourth factors, in Kāmabhogi Sutta; are examples to generosity.

In Buddhism the highest goal that can be attained by the individual is the Nibbāna. This cannot be attained by the individual until he is confident with the mundane need. Lay people are not like monks and nuns. They cannot obtain what they need from the others. At least four requisites (cloths, foods, shelters, medicines) cannot be accepted.<sup>33</sup> If they accept, they become beggars. Being a wealthy person, having the tenfold wealth mentioned in Vaddhi Sutta,<sup>34</sup> he can attain Nibbāna. In the Sutta, ten kinds of wealth, a noble possesses, are given.<sup>35</sup>

- |       |                                       |                                |
|-------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| i.    | <i>Kettavatthûhi vaddhati</i>         | - possession of land and goods |
| ii.   | <i>Dhanadhañña vaddhati</i>           | - wealth                       |
| iii.  | <i>Puttadârehi vaddhati</i>           | - wife and children            |
| iv.   | <i>Dâsakammakarâporisehi vaddhati</i> | - employees                    |
| v.    | <i>Catuppadehi vaddhati</i>           | - four foot animals            |
| vi.   | <i>Saddhâya vaddhati</i>              | - faith                        |
| vii.  | <i>Silena vaddhati</i>                | - morality                     |
| viii. | <i>Sutena vaddhati</i>                | - education                    |
| ix.   | <i>Câgena vaddhati</i>                | - generosity                   |
| x.    | <i>Paññâya vaddhati</i>               | - wisdom                       |

Appamāda Vagga in Dhammapada states that the foolish ignorant folk spend their time unprofitably, heedless of perfection. The wise man guards heedfulness (*appamādaṃ*) as his greatest treasure.<sup>36</sup> In creating a sound economy, idleness needs to be defeated. This is further evident with the facts found in Sigalovada Sutta<sup>37</sup> that one finds excuses not to work saying:

- i. It is too early.
- ii. It is too late.
- iii. It is too cold.
- iv. It is too hot.
- v. It is too hungry.
- vi. It is too full

Therefore, each society should be based on ethics. The ethical codes introduced in Buddhism should be practiced in achieving wealth and its consumption. If we neglect the ethics we have also neglected the happiness.

<sup>33</sup> *Civara, pindapata, senasana, gilampasa*

<sup>34</sup> Vaddhi Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya, Vol. V, PTS, p.137

<sup>35</sup> *dasahi bhikkhave vaddhihi vaddhamāno ariyasāvako ariyaya vaddhiyâ vaddhati sârâdâyi ca hoti varâdâyi kayassa katame dasahi*

<sup>36</sup> *Pamādamanuyyujjanti – bālā dummedhino janā Appamādaṃ ca medhāvī - dhanaṃ seṭṭham 'va rakkhati*  
Dhammapada Verse. 26

<sup>37</sup> Sigalovada Sutta, Vol. II, Digha Nikaya, pp. 302