

## GAUTAMA BUDDHA'S ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY: A REVIEW

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### Abstract

*The words 'human life' and 'money' are closely related to each other. A combination of these two is much needed to lead a life that truly means life. A life without even the slightest meaning becomes a very difficult affair to lead. Just as money is necessary for life, it should be earned and spent according to ethics and religious rules. It makes it possible to live a beautiful and fulfilling life. That should be what everyone wants, and every religion has taught that. Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, tried to teach his followers the same in his religion and philosophy. The Buddha came out of a life of indulgence and luxury and began to practice the spiritual life and truly acquired all the necessary knowledge in all matters. In the light of that acquired knowledge, he has imparted knowledge on various subjects to his followers. Similarly, he taught how to earn and spend money to lead human life well. He has told the story of his previous birth about the various uses of money in Jātaka. He said this even when he was present. Similarly, he has imparted beneficial teachings on the quality of life to his followers and others, which we can know from various Suttās of the Tipiṭaka. He did not come up with any scientific economic explanation. However, the core of his economic philosophy is the teaching of welfare and peaceful living. Gautama Buddha's teachings on economic philosophy are presented in this article in the light of various facts and data.*

**Keywords:** *Human life, Money, Gautama Buddha, Buddhism, Jātaka, Economic, Philosophy, expenditure, masses and Greed.*

### Introduction

At the time of Gautama Buddha's advent, village-based agriculture was the main source of the economy. The economic life of the Indian people was largely dependent on agriculture. They learnt to cultivate different

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cereals. Gautama Buddha has unquestionably travelled from the king's palace in northern India to the peasant's hut. As a result, the former prince was well aware of the socio-economic problems of the people of India. The Buddha did not just lay down rules for the association (Pali word *Samgha*). He has given advice in various *Suttās* on how people can lead a joyful and prosperous life. From these words, one can get a clear idea of the Buddha's economic philosophy. In addition, the Buddha sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly gave economic teachings about the objective life of people who came to him for initiation at different times and places. Sometimes on the way he talked about people's economic life. He gave various lessons on how to earn and spend and how to live. Which are compiled from various *Suttās* of the *Tripitaka*. In the light of all those facts and theories and in the context of the present time, a study of Buddha's economic philosophy will be presented in this article.

The continuous history of India can be largely known from the advent of Gautama Buddha. The social and financial picture of India is not very clear from 2000 to 600 BCE. Gautama Buddha spent much of his life in the major states of India. He was in the kingdoms of *Magadha*, *Koshala*, *Vaishālī*, etc. for a long time. He has also visited many provinces of ancient India, which are called the sixteen *Mahajapada*, such as *Kāshi*, *Shākya*, *Kuru*, *Vajji*, *Malla*, *Aṅga*, etc. He used to interact with people of different classes in the society. He used to talk to the people like the king, the minister of state, the soldier, the lord, the peasant, the householder, the cobbler, the sweeper, the goldsmith, the Brahmin, and the scholar. Again he started from the *mahārajā*, *seṭṭhi*, to the lower classes and people of the profession. He used to know about their happiness and sorrow. Wherever he was, he would listen to people of all levels and solve various problems. Buddha did not get tired of just preaching his moral teaching. Throughout history, we have seen the Buddha in the palace of Emperor *Bimbisāra* and *Kosala* king in the palace of *Magadha*, to distribute relief to his disciples during the severe famine in the *Vaishālī* and *Kosala* kingdoms, and he skilfully solved the problem that arose with the water of the *Sona* River.<sup>1</sup>

Buddha sought to remove the long-held slavery and barbarism by purifying the entire society so that people of all classes of society could live happily. He was well aware of the religious, political, and economic status of India because of his association (*Samgha*) with the people of root level, from the masses to the *rājā-māhārāja*. The Buddha was trying to make people of all classes of society happy with the purification of the whole

society. At the same time, the Buddha gave instructions to the followers of his family so that they could live with financial happiness. The economic instructions we find in the ancient Buddhist literature are inappropriate. The Buddha, in the midst of an enormous task, reformed the society. He was a spiritual guide, associated with his efforts to motivate people morally and economically. The ideals of love, equanimity, kindness, forgiveness, love, sacrifice, etc. were immersed in the social system of the time. In the pages of history, the rich, the housewives, and the nobles have left the pomp of wealth at the same time, under the influence of Buddha. They became the ultimate givers and benevolent to all of the people, leaving the love of money. At that time, Buddha was called teacher or 'sāstā.' As a public teacher, he talked about creating a discriminatory society. It was under his guidance that he created the *Bhikku* and *Bhikkunī*. In these two associations (*Samgha*), there were women of different classes. There was no discrimination whatsoever. Wherever discrimination arises, happiness and sorrow come about. The present people find the present time unsatisfactory. It is said that imperfection of expectation is the root cause of dissatisfaction. If this idea is correct, then those people who have such products and services are outnumbered, and those in which the levels of consumption are very high are supposed to be intensely satisfied. But this is not the same in all cases. Norway can be an example of that. *Leif Sandholt* states that, 'Norway has a rapidly increasing rate of alcohol consumption. It's not just that drinking has increased. Similarly, drug addiction has also increased. Due to this, suicides have also increased drastically. Criminal activities have increased two to three times. An example of which is murder. From the above information, 'there may be material improvement, but it may not bring happiness. Two things that is different. The researcher was able to reach such a conclusion.' (Dharmasena, p. 290).

Those who have met the needs are more satisfied (Chalmers, p. 54); this is not true. Even if the human being receives the gold as rain, he will not be satisfied. The Buddha says that 'even if the mountain gold is doubled, the people will not be satisfied' (Frowde, *Gāthā*-186). Even primitive people were not satisfied, and this dissatisfaction led to many new problems (Robert p. 80-98). Therefore, this dissatisfaction is a perpetual problem that has continued continuously from the primitive period to the present, and all people die of grief (Chalmers, p. 54). Since satisfaction has nothing to do with material enjoyment, this claim demands a more comprehensive analysis.

But Buddha has expressed the prevalence of happiness by referring to twenty-six types of happiness in ‘*Sukhavagga*’ (Woodward, p. 80-82). But the thing is that people cannot keep this happy experience for long. People forget it with the passage of time. Only people remember as long as they live. Then it ends. This is the law of nature. This disintegration creates sadness, dissatisfaction, and depression. Bad experiences are inherently unpleasant. Again, good experience is unpleasant because of its changing nature. Understanding good and evil requires no special experience or special knowledge. It doesn’t take a genius to explain that. These can be witnessed in real life.

Buddha spoke of the eightfold path. People can make a living in different ways. But one of the paths taught by the Buddha is *Samyaka Jīvikā*. *Samyaka Jīvikā* is one of the concepts of Buddhist economics. The *Mahācatthrika Sutta* (Robert, p.71) mentions two levels through which one can attain *Samyaka Jīvikā*. One of the *Suttās* is specifically addressed to householders. Besides, there are many other *Suttās* that explain how householders can earn a good living.<sup>2</sup> So these issues are related to livelihood as well as financial operations. *Samyaka Jīvikā*—which is sanctioned for householders—represents Buddhist economics. Financial stability is indispensable for living a family life. One of the reasons for the suffering of the households is poverty (Davids, p. 351). It is commented that only after obtaining a lot of assets should one start a home life (Carpenter, p.188). Wealth should be acquired at a young age. Otherwise one should repent in old age (Frowde, *Gāthā* 155-156). The first of the four types of happiness to the world is referred to as economic stability (Woodward, p. 69). Wealth has been described as one of the most sought-after objects in the world (David’s, p. 65).

The solution to world economic problems is Buddhist economics, which balances material life and spiritual life. The Buddhist economy is called the middle economist (Payatto, 1996). It’s part of the balance. Economy, morality, and spiritual life are neither separate nor isolated. On the other hand, it supported trade and profitability, and on the other, it added morality to the economy (Shinichi, 1997). Where materialists are highly concerned with goods, Buddhists are concerned with *mukti*. Buddhism follows a moderate approach that promotes physical development, not wealth. Addiction to wealth, not enjoyment, but the desire for enjoyment becomes a hindrance to man’s path of *mukti*. The key to Buddhist economics is simplicity and non-violence.

The person with the combination of wealth and good or moral qualities is a double-eyed person. And the one who does not have the combination of wealth and virtue is a one-eyed person (Woodward, p. 137). It also recognises the need for a person to have ten issues for overall improvement. Namely: 1. Productive land, 2. Money and crops, 3. Wife and children, 4. Employees, 5. Livestock cattle, 6. Respect and trust, 7. Virtue, 8. Worldly education, 9. Charity, and 10. Wisdom. These are the manifestations of the Buddha's vision of balanced economic development (Woodward, p. 137).

Buddha describes some of the benefits of wealth to *setṭhī*<sup>3</sup> *Anāthapiṇḍida*<sup>4</sup>. Households can use the wealth in five ways. For example:

1. He will spend his hard-earned wealth on the basis of his ability to sustain his life and provide for the care of his parents and children, wife, servants, and labours.
2. He will spend his hard-earned resources on the welfare of a friend.
3. It is necessary to keep it safe and secure in order that the hard-earned resources of the king should not be seized and destroyed by thieves, robbers, fire, floods, and beloved relatives.
4. If he or she is a hard-working householder or a person, he or she can spend money on relatives, strangers, and predecessors, paying taxes to the king and religion.
5. A person can use his hard-earned resources for charitable purposes, such as donations to *Bhikku*, meditators, and a welfare ally, or building a monastery.

In addition, wealth has nine benefits, such as:

1. Provision of food, goods, and housing,
2. Their parents, nurturing of children and servants,
3. Executing medical treatment for illness,
4. Performing regular donations,
5. Appraisal of relatives,
6. Appraising guests and visitors,

7. Giving to relatives of late relatives,
8. Offer to God or deity for good work and
9. Payment of taxes for the states.

There are three basic purposes of consumption. For example:

1. Holding human life,
2. Comfortable living and
3. The worldly basis for spiritual purification.

According to the Buddhist economic plan, all these purposes contribute to the production of goods.

An unconventional *Ananna Sutta* (Woodward, p. 69) and *Rasiyā Sutta* (Frowde, p. 336) filled; a disciplinary approach to consumption is introduced. For example:

1. One is happy with this wealth and will please himself.
2. A partner in this asset.
3. Use these resources to perform intellectual tasks and become aware of their bad consequences.
4. Without feeling sorry for it. Without being overwhelmed by it and not being enslaved to it, enjoy it.

Several sources have shed light on such content. Among them, the '*Pattakammā*' and '*Pañchabhogadiyā*' *Suttās* are quite important. Besides, the content of the *Suttās* is also largely similar. The main reasons mentioned are:

- I. (i) Great disciples of the Buddha earn their livelihood honestly. Therefore one can keep oneself satisfied and enjoy pleasure. He can be made happy by honestly earned wealth. (ii) They do what it is their duty to look after their parents. (iii) Takes good care of wife, children, and employees. (iv) Doing any good work as humans should. Similarly, for the sake of friends, one should protect them from any trouble or danger.
- II. He protects his wealth from flooding, confiscation, and theft. Again he can use the resources in any danger. He used it during financial difficulties.

- III. Earned wealth can be used for five notable purposes, such as in the case of relative danger, assistance to guests, deceased persons, payment of taxes, and religious welfare.
- IV. Those who are pious people and do not become lazy in life avoid all forms of negligence towards everyone. He will give gifts to all such noble people. And such people move towards kindness and tolerance. They are self-controlled and calm. (Dharmasena, 198-199).

Ven. Prof. *Kamburupitiye Ariyasena Thera* (Henpitagedara, Introduction-P II) at the end of the day, economics will matter. Life is not possible without minimum money. One way or another, this conversation will come. Like other religions, Buddhism also has a basic economic philosophy. Although approximate, it is true that it has some characteristics. Out of all those features, he highlighted features:

- i. While other philosophies have God's relationship with money, no such concept or relationship is absent in Buddhist philosophy. In the ancient world there was a belief in the Universal Mother (*Jagatmātā*<sup>5</sup>), the goddess of prosperity. In the Vedic times, a God called *Pusan*—the Lord of Cattle—is referred to in certain religious beliefs. The individual's economic life is closely intertwined with beliefs in gods and spirits. But the Buddhist economy felt that human labour was very important.
- ii. Economic development of a society requires the cooperation of all. But the ancient Greeks thought that it was only the work of slaves and no one else's, and both *Plato* and *Aristotle* approved this view. In India the economy was related to the caste theory. There is no such view in Buddhism, and it does not consider economic production the responsibility of a particular class of the society.
- iii. In Buddhism, the concept of "assets" is related to moral principles. The Buddha rejected such a strong view because he felt it. He knows everything that one experiences in the present is the consequence of his past deeds; it is pertinent to further examine the relation between the Buddhist economic philosophy and the *karma doctrine*.<sup>6</sup>
- iv. Buddhism is a humanistic religion. So this religion gives importance to humanity. Therefore, according to the said religion, the economy

is not only thought of as material but also has spiritual aspects, and hence, it is connected to both material and spiritual progress.

- v. Labour is considered the foundation of economic development.
- vi. Reciprocity is an important concept in economics. So this philosophy should be taken into consideration. As a result of that, there exist three factors, namely, the individual, the family, and society.
- vii. Declaration of definite and specific policies regarding the state and economic development. Herein views are expressed regarding planned production and equal distribution of health.
- viii. Economic policy is an important issue. Also, presentation of policy is absolutely necessary.
- ix. There must be a definite vision of consumption, not just of having wealth. This is prescribed by Buddhism.
- x. Bridging the gap between production, distribution, and consumption is very important in any economy. This is what Buddhist philosophy successfully does and thereby frees one from economic enslavement and instead uses the economic forces for the righteous well-being of the humans and finally brings about the just as individuals and families need enrichment, partners also experience the need for enrichment. (1978).

Indeed, the Buddhist economy is not a fully capitalist or market economy. Again, it is not a fully socialist economy. It can be called an economics approach to a new trend. Whereas the main objective or principle of economic thinking is to ensure the welfare and happiness of all people irrespective of race, religion, and caste and moral development. This can be termed Gautama Buddha's economic philosophy.

## Conclusion

In ancient Buddhist scriptures, Gautama Buddha spoke of the economic development of peoples in different *Suttās*, different narratives and different discourse. From time to time, Buddhist rulers took the initiative to implement it. In fact, Gautama Buddha did not express any systematic opinion in economic thought. Buddha did not teach anything about economics in the sense of what we mean by economics. However, from the different *Suttās* said discourse, Buddha's speeches aimed at improving the



quality of people's socio-economic life, it is possible to get an idea of the social and economic perspectives and to think about the practical aspects. However, he pointed out the poverty reduction, employment, investment, savings, income and expenditure, ways to protect wealth, and livelihood and create a moral life free from greed.

## Notes

1. The source of the *Sona* River is near *Amarkantak* in *Madhya Pradesh*. It is a tributary originating from the main peninsular plateau region of the Ganga. *The Sona* River is one of the longest rivers in India. Its length is 784 kilometers, or 487 miles. *Rihand* and *Uttar Koyel* are the main tributaries. *Sona* has a 35-55 cm steep slope. Monsoon water accumulates there. There is no water connection in the *Sona* River except during the rainy season. Because the river is wide and shallow.
2. *Mangala sutta*, *Paravaba sutta*, *Rasia sutta*, *Vogadiya sutta*, *Vyagghpajjha sutta*, *Ujjahaya vadi sutta*, *Kamvohi sutta*, *Anadha sutta*
3. *Setthi* (Pali *setṭhi*) is a Pali word, often used in Buddhist scriptures and inscriptions, meaning a "foreman of a guild, treasure, banker, 'city man,' or wealthy merchant" or "millionaire."
4. *Anātha Pindika* was the Buddha's foremost disciple among householders. He is named *Anāth Pindik* because he donates food to orphans. He invited the Buddha to *Srāvastī* and offered *Jetavana*. This *Vihar* or garden is known as *Anāth Pindik Ārāma* or *Vihār* after his name.
5. *Shri*, or *Lakshmi Devi*, is one of the deities of Hindu tradition. She is worshipped as the goddess of wealth, good fortune, fertility power, beauty, and prosperity. *Aaradhyā Devi* in the form of a mother in consideration of wealth or good fortune.
6. *Karma* is the basic foundation of Buddhism. People enjoy *karmaphala* according to their *karma*. Good deeds bring good results, and bad deeds bring bad results. Not only man but all living things are subject to *karma*. For *karma* is his origin, his recognition through *karma*; *karma* is his friend; *karma* is refuge. Just as a good life is gained by *karma*, so also is a bad life gained by *karma*.

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