

Marx and Buddha: A Buddhist-Communist Manifesto

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“Love other human beings as you would love yourself”
(Ho Chi Minh)

ABSTRACT

How can we eradicate extreme poverty and hunger without more equitable sharing of the world's resources? Is it possible to achieve universal primary education without a social commitment to public funding (otherwise who will train and pay the teachers, build the schools, and enable poor children to attend school?). The same arguments hold true for the provision of universal health services, free at the point of delivery, for the improvement of maternal health, the reduction of child mortality, and the combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Promoting gender equality and empowering women again involves a redistribution of education, wealth and power so that they are truly shared. Developing a global partnership for development will be an unrealised dream without developing international solidarity of the poor or without challenging the ways in which globalising capitalism relies on international competition for the hardest work coupled with the poorest pay and worst employment

conditions. How can we ensure environmental sustainability if we do not recognise that planetary and human resources have been exploited for private gain in the same ways? The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be mere rhetoric without expropriating and redistributing resources. One person's poverty is caused by another's wealth. Were we even to approach the attainment of the MDGs that would only be a temporary affair, given capitalism's individualistic goals of greed, accumulation and hegemony of resources that are driving the world in the opposite direction.

This article develops a dialogue between Communism and Buddhism on one shared aspect; the need for a humane society in which all things are held in common (although beyond this paper's scope are both Marxist economic theory and the intricacies of Buddhist philosophy, the comparison of which could highlight many points of difference, which would only increase ideological conflict, instead of promoting joint working for the common good). In furtherance of this goal, the paper focuses on the Zen Buddhist tradition, which privileges mindfulness, a way of living and being (not a religion that can be scorned by Communists) and a way of interbeing (that can be embraced by Communists, emphasising as it does comradeship and solidarity between people, with an understanding that all people 'inter-are'). Indeed, interbeing extends to all species, extending comradeship beyond humanity. A focus on Zen not only avoids doctrinal disputes with Marxism but also serves to align Buddhism with Communism; interbeing leads to inter-living, holding all things in common. Buddhist awareness of the interconnections with others leads to an awareness of their suffering and a concern to alleviate it. Communist societies aim to develop full human potential, to allocate resources for the benefit of all, and to guarantee an income, health services and education, thereby diminishing insecurity (Slott, 2011).

Buddhism is closely related to Communism on this issue. In Buddhism, the consequence of no self is no possession; thus Buddhism opposes capitalism's privileging of private property, instead advocating Socialism because it provides the best way to overcome economic

bondage and attain freedom (Puligandla and Puhakka, 1970). Accordingly, Thich Nhat Hanh (2007, p.175) stated “...in Plum Village we live simply. Monks, nuns, and laypersons - we live together like a family. No one has a private car. No one has a private bank account. No one has a private telephone. Actually, we are the true communists.” Similarly, the Dalai Lama (1996, p.38) declared; “I still think of myself as half-Marxist, half Buddhist” and again; “Marxism talked about an equal and just distribution of wealth. I was very much in favor of this” (Dalai Lama, 1999). It has even been claimed that the Buddha’s Sangha was “the world’s first communist social grouping” (Gunasekara, undated) and that early monastic “rules are far more rigorous than are to be found in Communism in Russia” (Ambedkar, in Rodrigues, 2002, p.179).

A synthesis of Marxism and Buddhism can address both external and internal factors that cause human suffering; Buddhism needs to attend more “to the external factors that generate human suffering” while Marxism needs to develop “understanding of the internal factors that generate human suffering” (Brien, 2002, p.96). Buddhism and Marxism are mutually complementary, as “...the primary concern of both Buddhism and humanistic-Marxism is indeed a deep concern about human suffering” (Brien, 2004, p.37). This paper examines how Communism and Buddhism can work together to reduce human suffering – and indeed the suffering of all species (all caused by the same exploitative Capitalism) – by seeking sustainable development and social change in support of the UN Millennium Development Goals.

INTRODUCTION

Engaged Buddhism privileges the role of the Bodhisattva – one who primarily aims to relieve others’ suffering and vows not to enter nirvana until that has been achieved. It is informed by the idea that there is no independent self, in which the search for individual enlightenment ceases and the focus moves to helping others (Shen-yen, in Brazier 2002). The preoccupation is no longer private liberation from suffering but the “nirvana of society” (Dalai Lama, in Brazier, 2002, p.97).

In Engaged Buddhism, the level of analysis broadens, shifting the blame for suffering from individual psychological attachment to collective social greed and exploitation. Accordingly, Buddhism's traditional three poisons of greed, anger and ignorance apply not only to individuals but also to large-scale social and economic forces (Kraft 2000). Internal and external liberation are simultaneous and reciprocal processes – and awakening begins with a practical understanding of the Four Noble Truths within a person's community (Ariyaratne, 1982):

1. A concrete understanding of suffering in terms of poverty and oppression.
2. Suffering is caused by greed, competitiveness and egoism.
3. There is hope that this suffering can cease.
4. Suffering is addressed by resolving these problems within the community.

As class conflict and exploitation of the poor cause human suffering, liberation is seen in terms of prerequisite material conditions and social relationships (Ambedkar, 1984). While dualism gives rise to grasping, greed, and class distinctions, Buddhism's goal shifts from personal rebirth to social reform and, in order to resolve the class struggle, to liberate the deprived and propertyless classes, using methods that exclude violence (Lin, 1929).

Capitalism emphasises competitive selves and is therefore incommensurate with the non-self of Buddhism, whose notion of interdependency is more aligned with Socialism (Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa, 1986)). Buddhism opposes Capitalism, with its notions of property, ownership and possessions as ends in themselves, because they are non-conducive to freedom but instead reinforce and perpetuate the ignorance that Buddhism tries to eliminate (Puligandla & Puhakka, 1970).

This article develops a dialogue between Communism and Buddhism on one most important shared aspect; the need for a humane society in which all things are held in common. Beyond the paper's scope are both Marxist economic theory and the intricacies of Buddhist philosophy,

comparisons of which could highlight many points of difference, which would only increase ideological conflict, instead of promoting collaboration for the common good. In furtherance of this goal, the paper favours the Zen Buddhist tradition, which privileges mindfulness, a way of being and living (not a religion that can be scorned by Communists) and a way of interbeing that can be embraced by Communists (emphasising as it does comradeship and solidarity between people, with an understanding that all people ‘inter-are’). Indeed, interbeing extends to all species, extending comradeship beyond humanity to the wider ecology. A focus on Zen not only avoids doctrinal disputes with Marxism but also serves to align Buddhism with Communism; interbeing leads to holding all things in common.

BUDDHISM AT THE CROSSROADS: CAPITALISM OR COMMUNISM?

Buddhism is at the crossroads, facing a stark choice between aligning with Capitalism or Communism; these are opposing ideologies and so it is not possible to follow both. Currently, “Western capitalism is looking for inspiration in eastern mysticism”, including Buddhism, and “...it sometimes seems as if it is the Buddhist ethic that is keeping capitalism going...The Buddhists stress the importance of “mindfulness” – taking time out from the hurly-burly of daily activities to relax and meditate” (Schumpeter, 2013). Mindfulness is becoming part of the self-help movement and part of the disease that it is meant to cure. It is seen as a source of competitive advantage, a means to progress in life, thus losing the point; “What has parading around in pricey lululemon outfits got to do with the Buddhist ethic of nonattachment to material goods? And what has staring at a computer-generated dot got to do with the ancient art of meditation? Western capitalism seems to be doing rather more to change eastern religion than eastern religion is doing to change Western capitalism” (Schumpeter, 2013). Buddhism becomes the cure for the stress induced by capitalism, functioning as its ideological supplement, dealing out an ‘opium of the people’; “The ‘Western Buddhist’ meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way for us to

fully participate in capitalist dynamics while retaining the appearance of mental sanity (Žižek, 2001).

THE NEED TO END CONFLICT BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND COMMUNISM

It is necessary to end the unnecessary and catastrophic conflict between Buddhism and Communism. If it is imagined that they are in opposition, then they will only continue to erode each other. We could compare this with how Christian Churches helped to overthrow Communism in the USSR the Eastern European bloc, which according to Qu (2011, p.438) shocked the Chinese Communist Party into more involvement in religious affairs because it could no longer afford to ignore religion when formulating government policy; “the party redefined its goals from making revolution to creating steady and sustainable development. As a result, the ‘socialist theory of religion’, which emphasizes the mutual adaptation of religion and Socialism, has become a part of the theoretical framework of the party. When working with the large number of religious masses in society, the party facilitates the development of religion as an agent of social harmony.” Thus Žižek (2011) observes that the Chinese government tolerates, supports and regulates religious practices in the interest of social harmony and stability; to curb the social disintegration caused by Capitalism China now celebrates Buddhism, which was formerly eroded by the Cultural Revolution; “In April 2006, Ye Xiaowen, China’s top religious official, told the Xinhua News Agency that ‘religion is one of the important forces from which China draws strength’. He singled out Buddhism for its ‘unique role in promoting a harmonious society’, the official formula for combining economic expansion with social development and care; the same week, China hosted the World Buddhist Forum” (Žižek, 2011, p.712).

THE POSITION OF BUDDHIST LEADERS ON MARXISM/COMMUNISM

Some Buddhist leaders have recognised their close (albeit not full) alignment with Marxism/Communism, both in theory and in practice.

For example, Thich Nhat Hanh (2007, p.175) reflected how “...in Plum Village we live simply. Monks, nuns, and laypersons - we live together like a family. No one has a private car. No one has a private bank account. No one has a private telephone. Actually, we are the true communists.” Similarly, the Dalai Lama (1996, p.38) declared; “I still think of myself as half-Marxist, half Buddhist”, arguing that Marxism is founded on morality (the equal distribution of wealth and the equitable utilisation of the means of production) while Capitalism is concerned with profitability. Subsequently, he again declared that “Marxism talked about an equal and just distribution of wealth. I was very much in favor of this” (Dalai Lama, 1999). In fact, this position is founded on earliest Buddhist practices. It has even been claimed that the Buddha’s Sangha was “the world’s first communist social grouping” (Gunasekara, undated) and that early monastic “rules are far more rigorous than are to be found in communism in Russia” (Ambedkar, in Rodrigues, 2002, p.179).

POINTS OF CONTACT BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND MARXISM

Marx critiqued religion as an artifice, a delusion and a diversionary consolation. Far from undercutting Buddhism (which is not a religion), Marx’s critique corresponds to the Buddha’s notion of false views. Marx’s description of religion as an opiate cannot apply to the Dhamma, which analyses reality. Furthermore, both the Marxist critique of religion and its atheism are commensurate with Buddhism (Gunasekara, undated).

In fact, there are several contact points between Buddhism and Marxism. As has already been stated, Engaged Buddhism is highlighting more and more how the Buddha’s teachings translate into social transformation, as well as the transformation of consciousness. Equally, Marxism begins with the problems of human suffering. Shields (2013, p.476) argues that “Marx was primarily concerned with alienation and dehumanization as the fundamental problems of human existence”, pointing out that “both traditions ultimately seek a resolution of existential determination in response to alienation” (Shields, 2013, p.462). Both philosophies are based on the question of how we can be

reconciled with ourselves and each other; both recognise the depth of human suffering and offer liberation from it; both critically analyse existence and seek radical change; both seek to transform consciousness, ending alienation and selfish individualism; both recognise that thought is not enough to end alienation and suffering - practice is also necessary; and both emphasise causality - it is necessary to eliminate the causes of suffering (Shields, 2013).

Other authors concur with the above points. For example, Slott (2011) argues that both philosophies privilege change, share a humanistic goal of alleviating suffering and reject otherworldly absolutes and dualisms. Additionally, Thich Nhat Hanh (1998, p.40) noted that “the Buddha prescribed Six Concords, six principles of community life” one of which is “sharing material resources.”

NO POSSESSIONS

There is no independent self in Buddhism. Suffering results from constructing a self that is independent from objects, resulting in alienation from them, the resolution of which is fallaciously attempted through clinging to them, in order to bolster this sense of self. The self suffers from feeling separated and alienated from others and objects – a gulf that consumerism exploits. The self attaches to that which appears to secure it and averts itself from that which it perceives as threatening. This dualism is reversed in two related ways; by not clinging to the things that are perceived to be outside the self, and through meditation, which gradually erodes the distinction between self and not-self.

In Buddhism, the consequence of no self is no possession; “‘possessing’ and ‘having’ presuppose something or someone who possesses and has, but in reality since there is no self which does the possessing, there simply cannot be any possession, either” (Puligandla and Puhakka, 1970, p.346). Buddhism opposes Capitalism’s privileging of property accumulation, which it sees as ignorance; collecting things and attaching the self to them loses freedom.

Living in a Capitalistic society demands the meeting of basic needs through the acquisition of goods for survival. Additionally, living in a competitive economy necessitates continual acquisition of goods for survival and security, as competition becomes a force to struggle against. However, Buddhism sees competition as non-freedom. By giving freedom to the economic system, man becomes a slave to it. Marxism and Buddhism concur that man is not born free and cannot attain freedom in a Capitalist society. Buddhism recognises that economic hardships destroy freedom and recommends the removal of economic needs to make freedom possible. It advocates Socialism because it can overcome economic bondage and thus enable freedom. (Puligandla and Puhakka, 1970). In contrast, "private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another" (Ambedkar, in Rodrigues, 2002, p.174).

There is much that Buddhism can learn from Marxism; while hungry bellies, material deprivation and poverty may be preventing spiritual fulfillment for people at one pole, consumerism, busyness and an ideology of greed, competition and selfishness may be preventing it at another (marxistbuddhism.blogspot.co.uk, 2012). How much easier would the spiritual path be if there was no need for possessions, of knowing that it was not necessary to hoard property for the sake of the security of one's self or loved ones? If we could all live like monks in the sense of knowing that one's basic material needs would be looked after by the community in which one lives (marxistbuddhism.blogspot.co.uk, 2012)?

Buddhism calls people to awaken to their original nature in the midst of daily activities, and to cherish the propertyless and deprived classes (Li, 1991). Heaven is not in the sky nor is hell below the earth; if we can be without suffering, earth would become heaven - but if distribution is not fair, then hell appears. Thus it is necessary to require from each according to their ability, to each according to their need, without selfish intention, each and every person striving to produce in common (Li, 1991).

INTERBEING

As noted above, greed occurs because people have no insight on non-duality. Furthermore, the constructed artificial separate self builds from this ignorance to develop hatred and desire, and to distinguish between people, giving rise to the class struggle (Lin, 1929). However, living in the awareness of ontological interconnections with the other person develops awareness that one is the other person (Brien, 2002). With this awareness, the other's suffering becomes one's own suffering. This leads to compassion, a concern to alleviate suffering, and a view that freedom only comes when the other is also free (Brien, 2002).

Thich Nhat Hanh (1988) coins the term interbeing and makes it central to his teaching. He advocates meditating on and thus becoming the other person, which leads to selflessness and compassion. Eroding the edges of the fragile separate 'self' diminishes selfishness. Non-discrimination between self and other leads to understanding and compassion. One suffers the other's sufferings and so seeks to relieve them. With compassion, we can look at all of living reality at once and see ourselves in every being. Embodying the suffering of others leads to our realisation of their suffering and impels us to extinguish it. Thich Nhat Hanh (2006, pp.81-82) explains thus:

‘Indra’s net is a vast, cosmic lattice that contains precious jewels wherever the threads cross. There are millions of jewels strung together to make the net, and each jewel has many facets. When you look at any facet of any one jewel, you can see all the other jewels reflected in it...the one is present in the all, and the all is present in the one. This wonderful image was used in Buddhism to illustrate the principle of interdependence and interpenetration.’

A BUDDHIST-COMMUNIST SYNTHESIS

Communist societies aim to develop full human potential, to allocate resources for the benefit of all, and to guarantee an income, health services and education, thereby diminishing insecurity (Slott, 2011). A Marxist society diminishes insecurity and competition. However,

some aspects of life would still cause suffering. At this point, Marxism reaches its limit.

The Dalai Lama (1996) complains that the flaw of Marxist regimes is their emphasis on class struggle, even to the point of destroying the ruling class, encouraging hatred and neglecting compassion. Ironically, although their initial aim is serving the majority, their energy is deflected into destructive activities during implementation. Once the ruling class is destroyed, there is little left to help the people; the entire country is impoverished and it is almost as if poverty was the initial aim. This is due to a lack of solidarity and compassion, twinned with an insistence on hatred.

He argues that we overemphasise political action, which privileges the external. Activists see malevolence as being caused by the system but without understanding how these factors operate within us. They focus on social engineering and a radical restructuring of society, assuming that personal virtue will result. Instead, he advocates the Buddhist opposing view - that radical transformation of society requires personal change first or simultaneously. Social change requires inner change – becoming less selfish (The Dalai Lama, 1996).

As this transformation is achieved, we develop moral responsibility (sulak-sivaraksa.org). While social forces such as consumerism emphasise craving and dissatisfaction, hindering our development, being religious involves working for social justice and change; “religion is at the heart of social change, and social change is the essence of religion” (sulak-sivaraksa.org).

It is imperative to recognise that individual transformation is a prerequisite of social transformation – and equally important to understand that the individual is shaped and constituted by social structures. Buddhism’s prescription for happiness lacks an understanding of the social conditions that cause suffering while Marxism overlooks the existential facts of suffering (Slott, 2011).

A synthesis of Marxism and Buddhism is needed to address both the external and the internal causes of suffering (Brien, (2002). The

primary concern of both philosophies is the concern with suffering. Buddhism is concerned with the internal and Marxism with the external factors involved in generating suffering; in that sense they are mutually complementary (Brien, 2004).

“Between Marxist criticism which sets Man free from his first chains, and Buddhist criticism, which completes that liberation, there is neither opposition nor contradiction. Marxism and Buddhism are doing the same thing, but at different levels” (Lévi-Strauss, 1961, pp.395–96).

In his book ‘Zen Marxism’, Shackley (2001) states that Zen and Marxism are both ways to emancipation, each addressing a different obstacle to it. Buddhism teaches that suffering is caused by attachment, which can be resolved by morality and meditation. Marxism teaches that social ills are caused by economic exploitation which can be resolved by socialist revolution. Thus liberation is both psychological and economic, both inner and outer, so that meditation and the building of the revolutionary party are both recommended and should be practised simultaneously. There is no contradiction between meditation and political activity.

Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa (1986) advocated Dhammic Socialism, a natural state wherein everything exists within a single system. The source of Dhammic Socialism is in nature, which has a socialist nature. Nothing can exist by itself; everything is interdependent. Plants and animals consume only what they need, without hoarding. There is a socialist intention within each person, consisting of interrelated and inseparable functioning parts, and the spirit of Socialism exists within all, given the necessity of living together. Humans failed to heed nature when they began to hoard and compete. This is why it is necessary for society to return to natural Socialism, taking only what we need and sharing our surplus with others to meet their needs. Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa (1986) advances the Sangha (except in the case of corrupt clergy) as an ideal socialist community that uses only what it needs, does not store and keeps no surplus. (Similarly, Ambedkar, noted that a Bhikku can have private property only in eight articles

and no more: 3 robes, girdle, alms-bowl, razor, needle and a water-strainer; “rules...far more rigorous than are to be found in communism in Russia”, ambedkar.org). However, there are several challenges that can be made to Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa’s (1986) Dhammic Socialism, which relies on voluntary personal frugality coupled with generosity to others, whereas Socialism classically involves work and state redistribution of wealth.

Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa’s (1986) Dhammic Socialism was based on what he perceived as the balance and harmony of nature, which itself has implications for environmental care (not just social care). He argues that if we used natural resources according to what nature allowed, we would not need to use so much and so there would be plenty for everyone indefinitely. However, we squander the earth’s minerals unsustainably, contrary to the Dhamma. If we used them properly, according to nature, there would be plenty” (Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa in Puntarigivat, 2003).

MANIFESTO FOR MONASTERIES

What are the implications for monasteries of a Buddhist-Communist synthesis?

1. In the context of Engaged Buddhism – and of the Marxist tenets of equality, alienation and dehumanisation – there should be a review of the role of the monasteries and the way that their privileged role casts that of the lay person into the shadows, alienating them. Should the monasteries suffer dissolution (as in the Reformation of the Christian Church in England) or can they be otherwise reformed and refocused around Engaged Buddhism? The dualist distinction between lay and monastics should be ended, so that monks work and are active in the community, while the laity should have a stronger monastic role, especially as meditators. The monastery should become a community centre of meditation practice and social and environmental action.

2. If there are to be monks, then they should no longer be a kept class, receiving a surplus (effectively as Capitalists) that encourages

dependency, laziness, greed and corruption, funded by poor struggling families. The resources of the lay community belong to them and should stay with them. Monastics must work for a living (as did the Worker Priests of the French Catholic Church) so that they can understand and identify with the working class. Such self-sufficiency can provide a model for the lay community of how to live and work mindfully, while developing a meditation practice that is sustainable in the world (not one that is divorced from the world and proffers little tangible benefit to it). This will liberate poor lay people, already stressed with work and burdened with supporting their families, from the additional burden of supporting a monastic community that is perfectly able to support itself (as occurs in parts of the Catholic monastic tradition).

3. Given the Marxist commitment to equality and the Buddhist principle of non-dualism, there should be an end to discrimination. The monastery should become a democratic collective community that erases the barriers between meditation and action, monastics and lay people, senior and junior, male and female, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, Asian and Caucasian (and other races), and between Buddhists and Communists – recognising their common aims and objectives of living together in a loving, caring and equal community (reflecting the principles of interbeing and Socialism). We should reach forward to these goals without fear of excommunication because it is the live community's affirmation that matters, not a lineage of dead monks (most of whom preceded the Communist revolution – and all of whom lived before contemporary social and environmental concerns).

MANIFESTO FOR THE MASSES

What are the implications for the masses of a Buddhist-Communist synthesis?

1. Lay people must have the same choice of a radical commitment; to live monastic-type lives (without possessions, albeit non-celibate) as lay people. Holding all things in common includes sharing the opportunity for liberation, which should not be the preserve of monks but ought to

be made fully available to the masses. The laity can be and should be freed from worries (through the provision of excellent state education, housing, welfare, and health services, free at the point of delivery – as in the National Health Service in the UK). (Refocusing on excellent state provision must involve the elimination of all competitive private services). This will reduce personal suffering, liberating individuals from worrying for themselves and their families, increasing care for others, while reducing the suffering of others – maximising happiness all round. Freedom from worries liberates the individual from focusing on the self and enables them to shift their attention to the needs of others. Liberation from personal anxiety helps one to develop meditation practice whilst freedom from poverty helps one to live a moral life (stemming the need to turn to crime). Radically living in this way will offer a beacon to non-Buddhists. Thus Communism delivers Buddhism.

2. Thich Nhat Hanh's philosophy of Interbeing demands that we develop collectivism and dispense with individualism, putting aside the Capitalist self that erodes the rights and liberties of other people, other species and our single shared habitat, planet Earth. Thus Buddhism delivers Communism.

3. Communism should guide Buddhist practice. In particular, the criterion for selecting meditation practices should be to ask; which ones inspire Socialism? A corollary of this is to cast aside those types of meditation that lead to an illusory nirvana that leaves us feeling self-satisfied, imagining that we have gained individual insight, when all around us is social and environmental suffering from which we have disengaged. The key success criterion for evaluating meditation is to ask – to what extent has it reduced social suffering? We should no longer nurture a false sense of individual peace that lacks insight to structural violence. Thus Communism delivers Buddhism.

4. Buddhism should guide Communist practice. For example, mindfulness meditation is needed to keep calm when non-violently fighting the class war that continues to rage around the world. Meditation can provide insight to the causes of structural violence and the solutions to it. Buddhism can help Communism to drive social change non-

violently, while having zero tolerance for structural violence. Thus Buddhism delivers Communism.

5. To avoid being undermined by Communists, Buddhists should avidly seek social change and social justice, not clinging to the status quo and not allowing Buddhism to be an opiate of the people.

6. To avoid being undermined by Buddhists, Communists should accept and work with the essentially socialist nature of Buddhism – and not dismiss it as a religion (which it is not) and as an opiate. Essentially compatible philosophies that both seek to end suffering need to work together to that end.

7. The four noble truths should be understood as applying to social suffering, not just individual suffering. These four social truths must be held as central to Buddhist teaching, in order that everyone can see the connection between societal greed (Capitalism, materialism, consumerism and commodity fetishism) and societal suffering.

8. Buddhism should be laity focused – with monastics serving the laity (not vice versa). Buddhism compares poorly with Christianity, with its priests and ministers supporting lay people and with a long tradition of developing welfare services. Comparatively, Buddhist lay people are neglected – and worse, their role is construed as supporting the monasteries. With no church, no pastoral support, no minister, no laity-focused liturgy, how can lay people be delivered from suffering?

9. A viable lay life needs to be defined, one that provides the discipline and structure that monastics often say they could not find as a lay person (and so decided to leave the lay life).

10. Buddhists must not collaborate with Capitalism but instead make it plain that it is not an option, as it is incompatible with Buddhism. Engaged Buddhists must stop the growing Dhammic Capitalism in its tracks (e.g. the selling of Buddhist practices and the use of Buddhism to justify and support Capitalism). Every effort should be made to synthesise the two philosophies that are commensurate – Buddhism and Communism.

11. The Buddhist laity needs to find a viable way to live as a Communist society. Some Communist systems have failed but Socialism has many viable models to consider. The family is a basic unit that shares wealth. Cuba is a beacon for Communism. The UK National Health Service is an excellent example of the principle; from each according to their ability; to each according to their need. Finally, the Asoke community is an example of sharing in common (although it is not identified with Communism and is subject to criticism). The next section examines the example of Asoke.

12. Within the world, the laity is better able to relate meditation to social and environmental action. Therefore, they should no longer simply depend on monastics to learn about Buddhism. Instead, they should be accorded an equal teaching role, as lay people.

ASOKE: A CASE STUDY OF BUDDHIST COMMUNE-ISM

Samana Bhodhirak founded the Boonniyom Community on principles of selflessness, simplicity, self sacrifice, self-sufficiency, and hard work and in opposition to the values of materialism and consumerism. Members live communally, working and producing food, and have established grocery and herbal remedy stores with the aim of helping consumers rather than making profits (Ekachai, 2001). His followers eat one meal per day (only vegetarian food), renounce the use of money, do not request donations, and commit to non-exploitation and self-sacrifice in service to others (asoke.info). The movement offers an alternative anti-consumerist community, attracting those disillusioned with materialism by offering them a close-knit community and a simple, modest lifestyle without luxuries (bunniyom.com). There is a strong value of sustainability too, as Asoke village communities rely on organic agriculture, produce that is sold to the public in cooperative shops on small profits. The income is invested in dental clinics and free schools, and to send members to quality hospitals. (bunniyom.com).

Inspired by the concept of right livelihood, the Asoke group convert barren land into lush gardens. They criticise the “export-

oriented cash-crop monoculture economy” that has impoverished both peasants and the soil; “the peasants are up to their neck indebted to the money-lenders and landowners, who have recommended the use of expensive foreign fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides. These fertilizers have then run into the rivers and rice fields killing all life in those waters. Even the groundwater has been polluted in some areas” (bunniyom.com). Therefore, they advocate natural fertiliser. Asoke criticise “the modern disposable junk-food culture” that piles up garbage, minimising wasteful consumption by reusing nearly every piece of paper or plastic. They recycle garbage by reusing, reselling, repackaging, reproducing as cooking gas, or composting into fertilisers. Many Asoke lay people try to eat only one or two meals a day. Usually, private homes are not air-conditioned in order to live in simplicity. The Asoke community prefers not to import goods owing to their emphasis on modesty and frugality, frowning on luxury (bunniyom.com).

Asoke asserts bunniyom or ‘meritism’ as an alternative economic system to Capitalism, which it criticises for having wrong criteria to measure success: wealth, position, fame and pleasure. Whereas Capitalists want big houses, more clothes and more money, followers are satisfied with small houses, little money, simplicity and modesty. The guiding principles of bunniyom economy are selling for low profit, changing for equal / lower price, and donating. Private property is not glorified and instead many resources are owned collectively. Money is pooled in a central office, from which projects can borrow. Asoke has its own private saving group, similar to credit unions. Many centres have libraries, health care centres and dental clinics. Asoke regards bunniyom as a method to create strong local communities. Their view is that freedom from selfishness, materialism and greed leads to a peaceful society (bunniyom.com).

Asoke is anti-consumerist in the sense that consumption is only for well-being, so well-being should be maximised and consumption minimised. Therefore, the community refuses to follow fashion, which is beyond the basic need of clothing. Many lay people wear their clothes

until the cloth wears out and have only a few sets of clothes, walk barefoot and foresake jewellery.

Asoke villages are self-sufficient in food and several household commodities, while collectively owning expensive items and pooling money through foundations for new investments. Asoke is opposed to governmental emphases on the export of cash crops, environmentally unsustainable tourism and globalisation, which they see as contradictory to the ideas of Asoke's self-sufficient village communities (bunniyom.com).

According to Heikkilä-Horn (1997), the key Asoke values include nature and the natural, modesty, devotion and sacrifice, concentration, unity, mercy, loving kindness and compassion, whilst the values that they oppose are luxury, wastefulness, and laziness. Metta should be shown to all that lives and should be shown through vegetarianism. The Asoke group embrace natural agriculture, natural food, clothes, eating utensils and building materials. Modesty is expressed in terms of eating little, wearing simple clothes, walking barefoot and living in modest houses. Modesty is opposed to luxury, which is perceived to be superfluous, a waste, and against the Buddha's teaching on the four basic necessities; clothes, shelter, food and medicine.

Devotion is to society, work and the Asoke group. One devotes one's work and energy to the group. Teachers and other workers (in vegetarian restaurants, shops, offices, kitchens, gardens, factories and workshops) work without pay. Lay people visit the Asoke centre after work to devote hours of work to Asoke without charge. For Asoke members, work is meditation. Every moment should be meditation through concentration, consciousness and awareness of the world (Heikkilä-Horn, 1997).

CONCLUSIONS

We cannot eradicate extreme poverty and hunger without more equitable sharing of the world's resources. It is not possible to achieve universal primary education without a social commitment to public funding (otherwise who will train and pay the teachers, build the schools, and enable poor children to attend school?). The same arguments hold true

for the provision of universal health services, free at the point of delivery, for the improvement of maternal health, the reduction of child mortality, and the combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Promoting gender equality and empowering women again involves a redistribution of education, wealth and power so that they are truly shared. Developing a global partnership for development will be an unrealised dream without developing international solidarity of the poor or without challenging the ways in which globalising Capitalism relies on international competition for the hardest work coupled with the poorest pay and worst employment conditions. We cannot ensure environmental sustainability if we do not recognise that planetary and human resources have been exploited for private gain in the same ways. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be mere rhetoric without expropriating and redistributing resources. One person's poverty is caused by another's wealth. Were we even to approach the attainment of the MDGs that would only be a temporary affair, given Capitalism's individualistic goals of greed, accumulation and hegemony of resources that are driving the world in the opposite direction. A Buddhist approach to the MDGs necessarily involves fundamental questioning of Capitalism and an alliance with Marxism. Marx and Buddha are brothers!

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