

The Many Faceted Nature of a Crisis: Ecological, Economic, Marketing, Cultural and Basic Human Values*

Padmsiri de Silva

Monash University, Australia

Abstract

This study is directly concerned with Buddhist contributions to environmental responsibility as ethics and culture and then link environmentalism with peace studies and most important to realise that we are confronted with a multi-faceted crisis. In fact, it has been mentioned that “peace researches now agree that peace is no more a stable state to be reached at the end of the tunnel, but a composite of dynamic interactions demanding continued striving because of the constantly changing conditions of all the forces/factors involved “Yeh, 2006).

There are many dimensions for “Peace Studies” and from a Buddhist perspective, peaceful coexistence between the human kind and the natural world provide the intrinsic metaphors for a holistic peace, and in search of an ideal beyond human conflict and violence, and economic imperialism, Bhutan provides the lasting images of integrating many lamps but one light—the best model of “Cultural Environmentalism”. Bhutan typifies a fine blend of the environment and human peace in harmony.

Story: Mulla Nasrudin was searching for his lost house key under the street lamp, and a man passing by inquired where he lost the keys, and Mulla replied in his living room! Stranger baffled, asked then why are you looking for it here? Mulla replied “The light is better here”. The Moral of the Story: people are looking for the key to happiness and peace with different theories and immersed in them, without realising that happiness/ peace is found deep within them, a message that comes across the gulf of twenty six centuries from the Buddha.

Road to peace has to be traversed through the welter of contradictions/conflicts between for instance on managing carbon emissions and limiting productivity, sustainable development and economic imperialism and the brilliant presentation on markets and morals in Michel Sandel’s *What Money Can’t Buy*, Sandel, 2012. Recent interpretive social science approaches use a dialectical approaches looking at illuminating contradictions, dilemmas, paradoxes, one might say light within apparent darkness.

“We are now coming to recognise that the project of gaining mastery of nature springs from a number of assumptions specific to Western industrial society: that happiness and well-being lie in the satisfaction of our material needs and sensual desires; that the basic orientation of human kind is one of conflict and struggle at subjugation; that nature must be conquered and made subservient to the satisfaction of our desires. We can also see that these

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assumptions are fallacious ones which, if not challenged and replaced soon, may well have grave consequences” (Bodhi, 1987, p.vii).

Venerable Bodhi says East Asian philosophies can provide the West rich sources of material for both *peaceful coexistence between human kind and the natural world*. Thus while developing increased awareness and understanding of issues as global warming, deforestation, water scarcity and explore alternative renewable energies, there is certainly a need to change cultural habits towards a more sustainable life styles through education and campaigns. I have published a version of *Buddhist Cultural Environmentalism* integrated with Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) and Buddhist Environmental ethics based on Buddhist culture stories (de Silva, 2015, 529-538, to which I will refer in the latter part of this study.

Two Horns of a Dilemma

My thesis that we need to look at contradictions and paradoxes for illumination may be discerned by a story from the *Palasa Jataka*, the story of the Golden Goose, a point eloquently presented by Bhikkhu Bodhi (2009, 155-173). A bird that had eaten the fruit of a Banyan tree voided its excrement on the trunk of a Judas tree. A golden goose tells the tree deity, do not allow the Banyan tree to grow, as every tree on which a Banyan tree springs is destroyed by its growth. The Banyan tree wrapping round the Judas tree consumed the share of soil, water and nutrition. “As time went by, all happened as the golden goose had foretold. The Banyan shoot sent down roots which wrapped around the trunk of its host and consumed its share of soil, water and nutriment. The Banyan grew bigger and stronger, until it split the Judas tree, which toppled to its death, bringing the deity’s home down with it”. This is a graphic parable for the present day crisis of global warming and typifies the kind of dialectic in the conflicting zones of economics, ecology and human wellbeing. The Banyan tree represents the use of carbon-based fuels, whose emission of carbon dioxide is invisible...small quantities, apparently harmless, and such unrestricted use of fossils menaces civilization that depends on it. There is a dilemma here: placing restrictions on carbon emission means limiting productivity and limiting productivity would usher in lay off and possible recession.

Unmitigated greed contributes to the resistance corporate leaders show to proposals to curb carbon emission, and greed is backed by the strong impulse to dominate and control and when delusion steps, it puts the screen that cannot go beyond the darkness that sets in, and we see the point of the Mulla, search for the key in dark places where it got lost.

The Mining Industry

The reality of the dilemma in the *Palasa Jataka* has been presented by an analysis of the mining industry:

“The mining industry is one of detrimental social and environmental consequences, particularly when not conducted with proper planning and rehabilitation. The extraction of fossil fuels continues to be a growing industry with many aspects of human life reliant on them. They provide great economic profit that allows their impact too often to be overlooked. Vegetation and animal populations of landscapes with mining activity are put at a greater risk and often become endangered. There are clear links between extraction activities, water contamination and loss of biodiversity. Many communities are affected with a great chance of contracting lung diseases and infections. Developing countries experience the greatest consequence with loss of access to water, other resources and the possibility of conflict. Regulation is needed to manage the activity however an increasing focus on renewable

energy sources appears the greatest solution” (Ishka de Silva, 2015). The case of the mining industry that I have presented in terms of the story in the Palasa Jataka is a paradigm experience which may be seen in other areas of the need to implement a holistic environmentalism that blends ecology, economics and ethics.

Buddhism and the Human Future

The environmental problems that the world faces today are unprecedented in the history of our planet: pollution, water depletion, deforestation, land degradation, loss of biodiversity and climatic changes. Though the living and the non-living systems have interacted over the ages to create a congenial human habitat, this balance has been destroyed due to the excessive exploitation of natural resources. But from the overall perspectives of the future of human civilization, what we are facing is not merely an environmental crisis, but a multi-dimensional crisis having intellectual, socio-political, economic, moral and spiritual overtones. As the World Future Council in Hamburg sums up in a document entitled, *Safeguarding our Future*: “There seems to be a growing consensus that the accelerating destruction of our ecological, social, political systems is at its roots a spiritual crisis”. As far back as 1982, Frit of Capra expressed the sentiment that “it is a crisis of intellectual, moral, spiritual dimensions: a crisis of scale and urgency unprecedented in the recorded human history”. *The ecological crisis, financial crisis and the crisis in peace feed each other*—that is the darkness that has to be understood and we need a new epistemology for the social sciences that deal with these issues which interpenetrate. Not the objective and analytical models but a “dialectical model” that sees the disasters that interpenetrate in a complex manner.

Lawful Nature of Things

A very insightful approach to understand the multi-dimensional crisis is to understand what the Buddha described as the lawful nature of things. A Buddhist diagnosis of moral degradation in relation to the environmental crisis or war, conflict and violence is understood in terms of the lawful nature of things (Dhamma niyama), lawful nature of the mind (citta niyama) and the moral implications of our actions (kamma niyama). The Buddha’s analysis of the laws of the mind pervade in understanding the varieties of human conflicts and his sermon on War, Wickedness and Wealth (Cakkavattasihanada Sutta) DIII, 58-77) emphasize the lawful nature of the law of dependent arising, where the moral order reigns supreme.

Twenty six centuries back the Buddha described the collapse of the moral order in society: “Since folk are ablaze with unlawful lusts, overwhelmed by depraved longings, obsessed with wrong doctrines, on such as these the sky does not rain steadily. It is hard to get a meal. The crops are affected with mildew and grown to mere stubs. Accordingly many come by that end-- That Brahmin is the reason why...things are so (*Gradual Sayings I*, 159). In the *Middle Length Sayings* (M I, 186), the Buddha says that there may come a time, if the moral order breaks down—when the four elements, air, earth, fire, water become unruly and as we experience today, tornados, earthquakes, bush fires and the tsunami floods. Thirty decades back, Fritjof Capra, said, that the crisis is unprecedented in human history. All this indicate the lawful nature of things (*Dhamma Niyama*).

The Crisis in Economics and the Crisis in Inner peace

To explore Buddhism and pathways for peace without looking at “Inner peace” is like staging Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. It is about people struggling with inner vacuity and superficial forms of happiness beneath the roller coaster of the economics.

The current economic crisis is inextricably woven with the ecological crisis, an unjust system and absolutely unstable. But the financial crisis which has been described as the *Cheating Culture* (Callahan, 2004) that financial risk taking, which is a virtual gambling mania is due to a number of factors, economic insecurity and anxiety, and cynicism about the unfairness of the economic system. In general the dominant economics is weak: “The laws of economics and psychology indicate that the hedonic treadmill which makes people move forward by earning more and more and spending more does not make them happier” (Gettins, 2010). They are subject to the laws of diminishing returns. In fact there is a crisis in *inner peace* which is described in a number of works: Tibor Skitowski in his *Joyless Economy*, Erich Fromm in *To Have or To Be* and *The art of Listening* depicts this inner crisis: “All the misery which is experienced by many people lie to a large extent not in the fact that they are sick but they are separated from everything that is interesting in life, that is exhilarating in life, that is Beautiful in Life”. Fromm, 1994, 165).

In working life people are subject to the “Time Compression Effect”. “With so many labour saving devices and efficiency measures, how is it that we seem to have so much less time? What social scientists call a “time compression effect” contributes a manic quality to much of daily life. Increased stress at work and school, sleep deprivation, up to the U.S work population suffering from burnout, workholism” (Loy and Goodhew) After researching into the predicament why people do not enjoy their work, in a groundbreaking study done with artists, musicians, hill climbers and athletes, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi found that sheer enjoyment of the act was the principle incentive, and he described these as “activities pursued for their own sake”. It is described as the “flow experience”, intentionally paying full attention to what one is doing. His work has enriched the *meditative culture* which is the subject of the next section.

New Pathways For Peace Studies: Developing Contemplative Studies

Arthur Zajonc , the renowned psychologist has suggested that widespread violence and inequalities in the world have emerged out of identity politics and that contemplative and transformative pedagogy offers a way to deal with these realities. I am presenting three areas in which I have been working which provides a comprehensive answer to the very valuable issues raised by Zajonc: (1) Sharing values in transformative dialogue; (2) New ideas for developing courses in contemplative education (3) Anger management as a therapist.

Sharing values in transformative dialogue has number of components: (i) deep listening, walking in the shoes of others, to suspend judgment till the dialogue matures, appreciating the beliefs and values of others and being at least tentatively critical of one’s views—being transparent and open regarding one’s own beliefs; (ii) cultivating strong personal relationships, and while creating a safe zone, interrogate one’s self understanding and explore the self-understanding of others. (iii) Take great interest in gender –diverse dialogues and non-religious ethics and look at different levels of identity, ethnic, religious, political, economic. (iv) Going beyond formal dialogue to music, visual arts, dance and poetry. In fact, the Buddha himself as context bound used skill in means and used metaphors, paradoxes and stories to get a point across to a listener. (references: Sharing Values, de Silva, 2011); Religious Tolerance, Education and the Curriculum, 2011).

Contemplative Education

In the way that I used the *Palasa Jataka* and then the *Cakkavattasihanada sutta* for the preceding analysis of issues, for the format on contemplative education we have the most relevant discussion in the *kalahavivada sutta*:

Arguments and quarrels are rooted in arrogance, the special preference to one's views are rooted in desire, with anger one holds to one of the opposing views and one dogmatically, holds onto one view, the wise man (muni) is free of such arguments (Sutta Nipata).

As I was reading this sutta, I stumbled on a book called, *The Argument Culture* by Deborah Tannen (1998) which is a critique of a culture in modern USA developing an adversarial frame of mind and the conviction that criticism and opposition leads to truth. The Buddha develops a paradigm of deep listening, self-reflexive education which develops self-knowledge and humility. In the story of the elephant and the seven blind men the Buddha emphasises that in certain contexts, Truth is not always white or black, but may have many sides. The contemplative method does not always seek quick answers, getting immersed in the question, almost living it, having patience with everything unresolved and love the questions themselves till the path to liberation dawns in stages.

Today a whole culture is focused on fast track speed, accuracy and certainty and this whole culture is epitomised by Gut Claxton's book, *Hare Brain and Tortoise Mind*, and according to the story the tortoise wins the race. The Hare Brain is dominated by the "D"Mode—finding answers and solutions rather than examining the questions where as the Tortoise is engrossed in the very journey and paradoxically gets to the destination first. Training a student to reason, use of argument and the critical faculty are a necessary part of education but we also additionally need a *less deliberative* and *more intuitive* kind of learning.

The fact that these perspectives on contemplative education are being currently developed and courses developed as a part of higher education emphasise it both its relevance and urgency and this is the current work of *The Centre for Contemplative Mind*. (Bush, Mirabi, 2013, 183).

Managing Negative Emotions

Restrictions on time, does not permit me to describe the work I have done on the education of the emotions and specifically anger management and other negative emotions. A forthcoming book, *Pathways of Somatic Intelligence: Emotions and the Body in Buddhist Contemplative Practice and Mindfulness Based Counselling*, Padmasiri de Silva, Palgrave Macmillan and Springer (2016) has a wide ranging study of the management of negative emotions with a focus on 'anger' and a useful resource for peace studies.

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Epitaph *The Crisis in Values*

Serious concerns of values embedded in World Peace and Human Contentment are the first casualties in a market driven world.

“This nonjudgmental stance towards values lies at the heart of market reasoning and explains much of its appeal. But our reluctance to engage in moral and spiritual argument together with our embrace of markets has exacted a heavy price: it has drained public discourse of moral and civic energy, and contributed to the technocratic, managerial politics that afflicts many societies today.” Michael S. Sandel, *What Money cant’t Buy. The Moral Limits of Markets*,