

## **Spirituality in Management Education\***

*Karma Ura<sup>+</sup>*

This paper is about the global challenges on the one hand and values on the other. Being from a Buddhist country such values may take a Buddhist tinge. The scale of interdependence between people of different countries and global challenges suggest that our values and behaviour should be aligned.

Most nations and peoples are motivated by the twin goals of peace and prosperity. Global peace has improved on a short-term retrospective, according to Global Peace Index (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2017). Global Peace Index is a composite index calculated by aggregating six measures of conflicts, 10 measures of social safety and security, and seven measures of militarization. Looking to the near future, the conditions of peace are expected to increase.

Prosperity has gone up as indicated by the fall in poverty and by the rise in global per capita income. The global income rose 22 times since 1960 in a matter of 57 years. Per capita income increased 57 times in the same period. Poverty is based on \$1.90 poverty line at 2011 purchasing power parity (PPP). In the last 25 years, the number of the poor fell from 1950 million

---

\* Abridged and edited for the journal, this paper is a valedictory address delivered at the International Conference on Spirituality in Management Education 2017, at Globsyn Business School, Kolkata, 1 July 2017.

<sup>+</sup> Dasho Karma Ura is the president of the Centre for Bhutan & GNH Studies, Thimphu, Bhutan.

in 1990 to 702 million in 2015 (Kuhlman, 2015). Not only poverty fell, the world is set to become richer.

Both the measures of peace and prosperity, however, reflect external conditions. These measures do not adequately tell us how human beings experience their lives within and through their thoughts and behaviours. They do not convey any deeper trends of deep human happiness or unhappiness. In fact, if we go by subjective wellbeing, which is perhaps too simple as well as not an encompassing measure to capture happiness, it is moving up very slowly. According to Jeffrey Sachs it has been falling since 2013 in countries like the USA because of social rather than economic crises (in Helliwell et al., 2017).

Increasing number of babies are born every second. Global population has reached 7.5 billion in 2017 (Worldometers, 2017). Global population growth rate peaked at about two percent a decade ago (Piketty, 2014), but it is still positive at little higher than one percent in 2017. Global population growth may become negative only by 2100. With every human being born, more ecological weight or footprints are exerted every second. Not only more people are born every year, they live longer. Technology and social progress have made them live longer, especially in the northern hemisphere.

One result of the growth of economy based mainly on non-agricultural sectors and a spectacular rise of global population has been urbanization of the population on a gigantic scale. Harvey (1982, 2000) has noted that credit expansion, as a vent for channelling surplus capital, is deeply connected to process of urbanization and property markets. Global urbanization sustains credit expansion. With an extraordinary level of concentration of human population in mega cities, we are closer to each other more than ever, but also far off from earth,

## *Spirituality in Management Education*

nature, solitude and silence. Time is becoming scarce, perhaps more than money in most people's lives. People live faster with more and more things to do within a given period of time in cities (Levine, 2003a; Levine, 2003b).

Justin Whitaker (2010) has compared our contemporary context to the Age of Wanderers (Shramanas) in India that lasted from fourth to sixth centuries AD. Out of the Age of Shramanas emerged many Indian spiritual traditions. They shared many common features. During that period of Wanderers or Shramanas, for some 300 years, the impact of Iron Age made the settled life possible. The production of farm surplus made dense settlements in towns and cities possible. It was a period of social transformation paralleling urbanization, dislocation and disruption. New social and economic forms produced a new sense of anxiety that the new philosophies or spiritual explorations attempted to address. We live in a similar environment of Information Age, and increasing urbanization, dislocation and disruption.

The Buddhist response to the crisis of the Age of Wanderers was to introduce four noble truths and other values guiding life. Its analysis led to a path of resolving dukkha. According to David Loy (2008) recognition of dukkha is not distinctive about Buddhism. Many Indian traditions speak of Samsara. The most distinctive understanding of Buddhism is that "intrinsic connection between dukkha and one's delusive sense of self is the most difficult dukkha to understand in the constructedness of the self (anatta)". Our sense of self is a result of psychological, social, and linguistic constructs. According to Loy, a sense of self arises from three factors: (1) psychologically constructed self; (2) socially constructed self in relation with other constructed selves; and (3) linguistically constructed self such as I, me, mine, myself creating illusion that there must be me.

Buddhism offered a radical view that “awakening to our constructedness is the only real solution to one’s most fundamental anxiety” (Loy, 2008, p. 17). Profound mental technique like non-dual mindfulness leads to a realization that “a constructed sense of self is not the real self.” Buddhism challenges us with the proposition that the fundamental constructed self we feel is a mask to hide what is not there and that “lack of self and the nothing at its core” is repressed in our everyday life.

Out of our immense effort to repress this “nothing at its core” (Loy, 2008), we try to become more real through wealth, fame and relative success, and other pursuits. We should add that digital advancement has enabled us to see and be seen in far greater numbers, making us feel supposedly more real than ever. All of us may not be able to take the spiritual path, devoting long years to yoga and meditation aimed at achieving non-dual mindfulness. At an easier level, Buddhism prescribed ethics of speech, action and livelihood, which were for lay people, appealingly put as five precepts of living. Certain global trends are viewed from the perspective the five lay precepts.

Consider taking life of sentient beings. With laws protecting life and liberty, progress in moral consciousness has decreased the number of people’s lives from being taken. In recent history, taking of lives of human beings has decreased. On the contrary, taking the lives of animals has worsened on an immeasurable scale over time. Statistics of slaughter of cows, chickens, pigs, and sheep show that 150 billion are killed by the meat, dairy, egg and fish industries every year. 56 billion of these 150 billion are farm animals (Occupy for Animals, 2017). 3000 animals are shot, hung, gassed, electrocuted or shredded every second in tormenting manner we cannot even begin to imagine. Each of us is estimated to eat about 20 animals every year on average including fishes. If that is the

## *Spirituality in Management Education*

annual rate of eating slaughtered animals, each of us chomp down 1400 animals over our lifetime of 70 years. We feed, they die. If a person is an intense meat eater as he or she is in the USA, lifetime animal eaten is estimated to be 7000 animals (Humane Society of the United States, 2017).

The evolution of human beings as meat eaters is built metaphorically on mountains of animal flesh (sha khon) who died as our food, as one Buddhist yogi Lhatsun Namkha Jigme (nd) wrote.\* Yet we can live in vegan, organic and environmental way for some part of our time, even if not always. Animals have the same capacity to suffer as human beings. They have psychological, behavioural, and evolutionary similarities with us, according to Peter Singer (2015). Mammals, birds, vertebrates, and some invertebrates and human beings are similar in these aspects. If so, they deserve better treatment during their lives, with less pain or suffering.

Mahayana Buddhism has a deontological view with regard to not taking what is not freely given. The criterion is not determined by the degree of good or bad outcome. It is wrong irrespective of the degree of consequence. Taking what is not given is equivalent to lack of consent. In a contemporary context, we have to ask to whom something belongs? Who owns it? Could we interpret this to include exploitation of any kind, including by corporations, who exploit to make profit. One consequence of exploitation is inequality. No exploited worker freely gives

---

\* He lists three karmic debt (lan chags) owed to various creditors: they are the debt of food (zas), the debt of land (gnas), and the debt of wealth (capital, nor) which are owed by the present generations.

away all of his or her fruits of labour. No customer gives away all the unjust prices freely, if he or she could oppose.

The precept of false speech could be extended to any form of disinformation and misinformation including untrue labelling and marketing.

The precept of avoiding sensual misconduct could cover any indulgence, including addiction, craving, and dependence that causes harm to users as well as others. About 246 million people were reported to be using illicit drug in 2013 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013). This is one in every 20 adults between 15-65 years of age. The number of addicts is expected to rise rapidly among the urban populations in the developing countries.

It is important to distinguish between personal values and institutional or systemic values. Institutions and corporations operate at a collective level, at an impersonal level, where profit and growth take a life of their own. There is no personal moral responsibility applied to institutions and corporations. Institutions are made into legal person, but they have no moral personhood. Yet, the world is directed and shaped largely by corporations and institutions. World is owned by corporations, which are further controlled by significant minority of the global population. They play us all along the narratives they want us to play (Hershock, 1999). Guiding indicators of most corporations consist of financial and market performance indicators but very little of spiritual and moral concerns. Moral concerns are relegated to individual and households. But the individuals may be complicit or forced to play along with organizations.

## *Spirituality in Management Education*

Mathew Kapstein (2000) noted perceptively that Buddhism was once the most dominant cultural system in the world. Mahayana Buddhism spread north becoming the most influential cultural export from ancient Indian civilization. Key methods of Mahayana included not only the threefold system of ethics, meditation and wisdom, but included additional virtues such as generosity, energy, persistence and patience while practicing the Bodhisattva path. In a Bodhisattva path, which is the path of collective action towards enlightenment, concentration, patience, endeavour and long-term commitment are needed. None are possible without focus, and that is not possible without concentration.

The economies and societies are being increasingly redefined by capitalism or corporate power, urban metropolis, cultural imperialism, neo-liberalism and digitalism, leaving very little space even to be 'street Bodhisattva'.

How can we rebuild our values in the contemporary world? While we may share anxieties that arises from social transformation, dislocation and community disintegration similar to what took place during the Age of Wanderers from the fourth to sixth century India, our world is on a dangerous edge unlike ever before in the known and unknown history of the planet.

First of the two inconceivable threats is climate change. Climate scientists and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have forecasted that in spite of "current commitments from the world's nations, we will overshoot the 2°C target" because we are still emitting 42 giga tonnes of CO<sup>2</sup> each year. Change is not yet happening fast enough (Heffeyan, 2014). Arctic as we know is almost gone and sea level are bound to rise. The Himalayas as we have seen in our childhood

will not exist for long. A hotter world will not only drown assets and land, but make the global farm output fall heavily.

The negative impact of climate change will fall heavily on those nations and places, which had used the fossil fuels relatively less and have played less role in causing climate change. Thus, the ecological creditors are the ones who could be devastated more than the ecological debtors.

Annual GDP is lower than their debt stock in many countries. It exceeds their annual income in some countries. It means that future generations have to pay the debt out of their income. The US is the main debtor to the world, borrowing US \$ 2 billion a day (Harvey, 2007) mainly from China, Japan and the Arab countries (Harvey, 2007, pp. 193-198). Such mismatch between debt and income are not only adverse. Future generations are the ones who will pay greater price than the present generation.

Ecological and financial debts are owed by the present generation to the future generations for imposing arbitrary burdens on them. We owe not only gratitude to the past but to the future generations. The awareness of living beyond means in moral and material senses found in these two debts should reorient our consciousness.

There is both a moral dimension to climate change between present and future generation and between intense fossil fuel users and the rests, including other sentient beings who did not at all contribute to the escalation of desire for fossil fuel driven technology and fossil fuel-based energy.

The second inconceivable threat to human existence that did not exist till 1943 is the presence of more than 15,000 nuclear



## *Spirituality in Management Education*

weapons (Tian et al., 2016). And as if these are not enough there are more nations who want to be nuclear-armed. In fact, such industrial scale production of instruments of destruction and murder began in the age of empire building. The 19th century (1800) saw the development of rifles like Enfield rifle in 1853, which was used throughout the British Empire to suppress colonies with minimum manpower and maximum lethal force.

Each time a weapon was invented, it was hoped that it would be the weapon that would end all wars. The Maxim gun could fire 600 rounds a minute invented in 1866 was then considered the weapon that would end all wars. But these dark and terrible sides of innovation only led to more sinister technologies. Killing machines with greater precisions and force are being invented. Military spending dwarfs spending on climate change. Battle deaths underestimate the ripple effects of conflicts. In some countries, arm exports fuel the economy. They are the merchants of death, in a sense. Cessation of conflicts would harm their exports and their economies. As Loy (2008) commented, the theory of preventive wars and just wars “every war becomes marketed as a Just War.”

I began this paper with reference to the twin goal of prosperity and peace. We do not know how much prosperity will be enough, if ever. We do not know how much nuclear weapons would be ironically enough for peace.

Though the measure may be crude, inequality measure shows a stark distribution. Oxfam report shows that 62 richest people in the world own 50 percent of the wealth in 2015 (Oxfam, 2016). In the USA, which is the wealthiest nation on earth, top 1% of the population owned 20 percent of the income in 2010 (UNESCO, 2016). So, the world we live in is highly unequal in

economic term. Oxfam study showed that one percent owned 58 percent of total wealth in India. That is “57 billionaires in India now have the same wealth (\$216 billion) as that of the bottom 70 percent population of the country,” although such measures may be taken as indicative rather than definitive.

While infectious diseases are controlled, the major disease burdens are non-infectious and life style related disease. Ischemic heart diseases, depression and mental disorders are major sources of ill health. As Michael Marmot (2006) noted, “the key to understanding and improving health is in the mind.”

The need to shift to better values is obvious in the light of these complexities. Values and policies should be linked. Examples of clear set of values that are linked to policies is Gross National Happiness in Bhutan. Gross National Happiness takes both subjective and objective conditions of living into account in major development programs. It is part of value education in schools (Karma Ura, 2016) with the hope that more aspects of moral personhood are built during the most formative period of life.

## **References**

- Berger, S. (2017). *The social costs of neoliberalism*. Nottingham: Russel Press.
- Dhammika, S. (2015). *Nature and the environment in early Buddhism*. Singapore: Superskill Graphics.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2001). *Eight mindful steps to happiness*. Canada: Wisdom Publications.
- Harvey, D. (1982). *The limits to capital*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.  
See also

## *Spirituality in Management Education*

- Harvey, D. (2000). Possible urban world. *Megacities Lecture 4*. Amersfoot, The Netherlands: Twynstra Gudde Management Consultants. Retrieved from <http://www.kas.de>
- Harvey, P. (2000). Introduction to Buddhist ethics: foundation, values and issues. Cambridge University Press.
- Heffeinan, O. (2013). Living with climate change: can we limit global warming to 2°C? *New Scientists*, 21 June.
- Helliwell, J F., Layard, R., Sachs, De Neve, Jan-Emmanuel, Huang, H., & Wang, S. (Eds.), (2017). *World happiness report 2017*. Retrieved from <http://www.worldhappiness.report>
- Hershock, P. (1999). *Reinventing the wheel: a Buddhist response to the information age*. NY: State University of New York Press.
- Humane Society of the United States (2017). Animals. Retrieved from <http://www.humanesociety.org/>
- Institute for Economics and Peace (2017). *Global Peace Index 2017, Measuring Peace in a Complex World*.
- Jackson, T. (2009). *Prosperity without growth*. UK: MPG Books.
- Kapstein, M. T. (2000). *The Tibetan assimilation of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press: NY.
- Karma Ura (2014). Dialog on the destinies of nations. In J. Colombano & A. Shah (Eds.), *Learning from the world* (pp. 277-288). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Karma Ura (2016). Gross National Happiness: values education and sustainability in Bhutan. In *Reorienting Educational Efforts for Sustainable Development*. Netherlands: Springer Nature.
- Kuhlman, C. (2015). 5 global poverty infographics show 2015 progress. The Borgen Project. Retrieved from <http://www.borgenproject.org>

- Levine, R. (2003a) Kindness of strangers. *American Scientist*, 91.
- Levine, R. (2003b). *Geography of time*. England: Oneworld Publications.
- Lhatsun Namkha Jigme (nd). Mountain smoke offering: from the life-force practice of the Vidyādharas (Rigdzin Sokdrup). Retrieved from <http://www.lotsawahouse.org>
- Loy, D. R. (2008). *Money, sex, war, karma*. USA: Wisdom Publications, Inc.
- Michael, M. (2006). Michael Marmot forecasts the future. *New Scientist*, November 21. Retrieved from <http://www.newscientist.com>
- Occupy for Animals (2017). Animals slaughtered since you have opened the website. Retrieved from <http://www.occupyforanimals.net>
- Oxfam (2016). An economy for the 1%: how privilege and power in the economy drive extreme inequality and how this can be stopped. *210 Oxfam Briefing Paper*. Retrieved from <http://www.oxfam.org>
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the 21st century*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Harvard University Press.
- Singer, P. (2015). *Animal rights - the definitive classic of the animal movement*. 40th Anniversary Edition. UK: Open Roads Media, Oxford.
- Tian, N., Fleurant, A., Wezeman, Pieter D. & Wezeman, Siemon T. (2016). Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2016. SIPRI Fact Sheet, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.sipri.org>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2016). *World Social Science Report*

*Spirituality in Management Education*

*2016: challenging inequalities: pathways to a just world.*  
Paris: UNESCO.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013). *World drug report 2013*. Retrieved from <http://www.unodc.org>

Whitaker, J. (2010). Religious Studies 232: Introduction to Buddhism. Power Point Presentation. Retrieved from <http://www.powershow.com>

Worldometers (2017). Current world population. Retrieved from <http://www.worldometers.info>