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Sufficiency and Material Development: A Post-secular Reflection in the Light of Buddhist Thought

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The notion of 'sufficiency consciousness' is a way of life to be adopted towards attitude change in a world that craves for absolutist secularity and religious dogmatism. The paper explores aspects of sufficiency that could promote material development, and as such require a total attitude change and behaviour remodification of public life. It is obvious that performance-driven targets, accelerated growth, investment and prosperity-driven agenda by market forces alone would lead to a skewed understanding of both the notion of sufficiency and material development. Hence, a proposition for value-based sense of material development, ethical buying and consumption have all become survival strategies for civil society groups and organisations to effect change from within. In the Buddhist scheme of thought, two significant core concepts of wisdom and compassion impact on social change and behaviour. Developing non-material values generated by wisdom and compassion are proposed as a lifelong pursuit in understanding human tendencies such as greed, clinging, and craving to amass wealth and excessive indulgence. Such an approach and an analysis evoke a sense of sufficiency alongside appropriate and sustainable material development. The use of certain economic indexes and other technical data in the paper indicate and symbolise the extent to which material progress is emphasised over and above the non-material. A possible development of an index such as Gross National Happiness (GNH) as proposed by the Thai specialists is included as an alternative to the sole-material-progress-based data discourses. Cultivating oneself with compassion juxtaposed by wisdom challenges all to uphold goodness as part of being human. Opposition to such a view of life and a way of life is problematic in the light of the current phenomena of theatrical performance of violence to redress grievances as well as limitless confidence in economic growth and greedy investment plans. It is a value-laden counterpoint to the zero tolerance that can address the larger socio-political issue of the alterity[1] that both help to understand what actually sufficiency means in the array material development. Wisdom becomes a guide to action with compassion, while compassion expands the capacity of wisdom to understand the part and the whole. It is in this interplay of value-tracking that one is able to realise the importance of human activity that can evolve checks and balances, which are imperative

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to measure material development and social progress. 'Sufficiency consciousness' and material development are healthy, vibrant and adaptive aspects for civil society groups as well as other institutions to participate critically in 'religious affairs' in a 'secular realm' with what life offers. The non-material basis of wisdom and compassion offers a wholesome view of 'sufficiency consciousness', which is fundamental to material development, economic activity, political governance, institutional arrangements and campaign strategies, for civil society groups to achieve their potential. Wisdom steers compassion while compassion transforms wisdom in those engaged in human activity, which is both about 'here' and the 'not yet'.

Introduction

There is a perception that a tug of war exists between enlightened freedom and religious dogmatism. The Cartesian bifurcation of socio-political institutions and other aspects of life in general made this gap much wider since the Enlightenment. Such thought led also to a stubborn dichotomy between material and non-material values. The economic recession erupted in about late 2008, when the so-called 'unsinkable' financial institutions, of titanic proportions, were at the beck and call of states, and needed to be rescued from their short-sighted decisions, saturated structures and irresponsible economic conduct. Both the technocratic security and super economic mechanism cum market strategy were deeply vulnerable during the last decade, and their impact was resonating like a drum echoing through 'the corridors of power' of the world's richest nations down to the community soup-kitchens run by charities. Both material and the non-material value-laden structures are compelled by sheer circumstances to find answers to the pressing demand for order in the social, political and economic conduct in every strata of life.

Civil society groups involved in campaigns of different types, as social movements and religious groups, have articulated the need for a wider consultation and for democratic pursuits amidst the rapid growth of violent extremism, a startling symptom of a social decay. It is ironic that non-material values have their foundation in religious traditions even though such have been incorporated into other institutions as models of good practice for the common good. This article attempts to explore areas where non-material values form themselves into effective agents of attitudinal change and community engagement in light of Buddhist thought and practice.

Material versus non-material?

The debate on the dualism of the material and non-material is as old as human beings themselves. Their interaction with everything from the discovery of fire to the invention of the microchip that revolutionised the whole material world is distinct. The impact of the gushing world of material on non-material values in contemporary society is unprecedented from the classical world of development of ideas to the post-structuralist views of deconstruction. The latter system, according to some, is a tool that challenges the thought patterns that underline the world of value and meaning, traditionally accompanied by diverse religious persuasions. Modern views of public policy and its operational framework within the democratic process have offered a sense of ownership

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and community engagement in their own affairs. Alan Race is of the view that 'political liberalism combined with pragmatic decision-making has brought many benefits. It brought an end to the over-weaning power of religious institutions and opened up a new sense of dignity for individuals'.[2] However, he is hesitant that 'the wholesale accommodation to the processes of secularisation which accompanied political liberalism was bound to remain problematic for the religious mind'.[2] Race is sympathetic towards the secular project as long as both parties are willing to have a decent and mature dialogue on the objectives and the well-being of what the two parties campaign for.

The material world is all pervasive, which is its very nature, and intrusive by its very operational view of life. The apparatus could easily be misunderstood and fabricated to promote an opposite meaning and being. The material and the non-material tussle have been further impacted and widened by the massively activated processes of globalisation. This process is well described by Robert Tollison, that 'Globalisation is a process which is technologically driven and as the process continues to add and to unfold, it leaves behind some winners but many losers'.[3]

It seems that there is abundant evidence that globalisation has benefited the technologically advanced countries and while harming the vulnerable economies of the global South and other developing countries. The digital gap between the two worlds also refers to the dynamics related to power arrangements, the socio-economic index and its political implications, the exchange of goods and services, international trade, and fiscal capability. The Information Society Index (ISI)[4] in 2002 interestingly categorises countries into five groups. The variables that they used to identify them are:

(1) Computer infrastructure
(2) Internet infrastructure
(3) Information infrastructure
(4) Social infrastructure

The categories, which have been carefully determined and describe the market-finance cum information-led mechanism to specify the nations in terms of their material power and fiscal capability, are classified into five Ss:

(a) *Skaters*: Advanced countries that are in a secure position (technologically, economically, socially and politically) to benefit from the information revolution. Sweden, the US, Finland, Australia, UK, Japan, Germany and so on.
(b) *Striders*: Have the necessary infrastructure in place and are moving forward Belgium, Austria, France, Korea and so on.
(c) *Sprinters*: Nations that are shifting their priorities and at times seem to move ahead by making adjustments, Poland, Chile, Argentina, Malaysia, Russia and Brazil and so on.
(d) *Strollers*: These move ahead but in an inconsistent and limited manner Egypt, China, Indonesia, India and so on.
(e) *Starters*: These are the cluster of nations at the beginning of the road to the information revolution, which in total constitutes about 40% of the world's population. (See Ref. 4 for a more sustained discussion on this classification.)

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ISI's classification is made primarily to measure the nations according to their ability to access and absorb information and information technology. But it is intriguing to see the following three key aspects in the material cited above:

1. How economic factors impact on the growth of IT products and services
2. Which leading IT signify the market change
3. Which country markets offer the best opportunity for growth.[5]

The baseline analysis deployed by the ISI alongside other factors of economic growth and risk management processes clearly indicate the seriousness of 'material' in the life of a population and even states and governments seem to depend on these indicators. What seems to lie beneath the Gross Domestic Production (GDP) is wealth creation without which an economy would collapse, resulting in structural decay and anarchy.

The Information Society Index (ISI) seems determined to make certain conclusions on society solely on the basis of economic factors and grossly neglects other crucial factors, such as non-material values that are fundamental to the formation of society and how people function. The index suggests this when it discusses the Skaters to be in a secure position by way of their technological aptitudes, social mobility and political maturity, while it fails to make the same kind of analysis on the last three ((c), (d) and (e) in the above list), which makes one to suspect the very tool of the analysis to make a value judgement of how societies operate in any of the five-sector nation-states. The ISI is yet another example of the dichotomy between the material and non-material debate that is ongoing.

The lack of a middle ground on which to focus, both in terms of actual pragmatism and theoretical framework, is what causes unpalatable decisions to be taken at the institutional level, and in fact pushes even the boundaries of democratic processes. The example of the so-called 'economic miracle' of Dublin and Dubai going into serious recession by the Autumn of 2008 alarmed even the 'financial deities' and the 'economic gurus' of the promised land of prosperity and the much desired new and absolute salvation in the liberal economic agenda.

Buddhist discernment

Buddhism is a religious tradition that has its origins in the fifth century BCE. Siddhartha Gautama, more popularly known as the Buddha, the Enlightened One, in pursuit of the meaning and purpose of life, experimented on himself and wished to achieve complete emancipation through his own life and practice. Hence, what the Buddha taught was what he realised as a human being, and he wished to direct others towards leading wholesome lives. He did not reject or deny the 'material' world as corrupt or unhelpful. Instead, the material is modestly encouraged, if mobilised, as a means to capture the core of non-material values, which are fundamental to building communities that are engaging, not isolated; sustainable and not fractured; cohesive and not in conflict. The Buddhist proposition is clear and simple as a way to adopt a disciplined living. It demands a structure to follow but acknowledges its own pitfalls and deficits if the path is not treated and followed as a spiritual culture. It looks at the nature of reality and recognises that all reality is impermanent (*anicca*), in a state of flux; 'unsatisfactoriness' (*dukkha*); that all reality is liable to a state of 'unsatisfactoriness' (dis-ease); and that there is no such thing as

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self (*anatta*) – the three characteristics of existence (*thilakhana*). This 'unsatisfactoriness', which is the second of the three characteristics of existence, the Buddha explained, is apparent in all human beings but he proposed that it can be contained and transformed into a positive reality. His discovery of Four Noble Truths (*cattari ariyasaccani*) was that this reality of 'unsatistactoriness', can be ceased, and that there is a way to deploy oneself in the process. His astute invitation was to tread the Noble Eightfold Path or the middle path (*majjhima patipada*). The genius of the Buddha is that he wraps the pursuit of human happiness and bliss in an ethical codification evolving a paradigm of non-material value formation. He explains the path (*magga*) from a middle-ground approach, through eight different but interrelated ethical conducts, for a wholesome living – the Noble Eightfold Path.

Right Understanding (*Samma ditthi*) – broader view of reality
Right Thought (*Samma sankappa*) – organisation of one's thought helpful to behaviour
Right Speech (*Samma vaca*) – correct use of speech
Right Action (*Samma kammanta*) – correct behaviour
Right Livelihood (*Samma ajiva*) – ethical means of earning a living
Right Effort (*Samma vayama*) – conducive use of one's energy
Right Mindfulness (*Samma sati*) – training in introspection
Right Concentration (*Samma samadhi*) – gathering of the mind

The Buddha identifies this specific process as a clear option to embrace a wholesome ethical practice and a deep socio-moral commitment to non-material value in everyday life. The late Ven. Walpola Rahula, a scholar monk says, quoting a Buddhist text, that 'these eight factors aim at promoting and perfecting the three essentials of Buddhist training and discipline:

(a) An ethical conduct (*sila*)
(b) Mental discipline (*samadhi*)
(c) Wisdom (*panna*)'.[6]

Aloysius Pieris, a Jesuit scholar and Indologist describes these three essentials as the moral, ascetical and mystical dimensions of the path (*magga*),[7] which in fact summarises the key notions within the ethical aspirations of Buddhist thought. Thai Buddhist scholar and a teacher of 'Dhammic socialism', Sulak Sivaraksa, criticises the development models of Capitalist and Marxist doctrines, which have both focused on primarily on material development,[8] while alienating non-material values in their societies. The economic recession that the world is undergoing in the latter part of this decade – resulting in its unregulated financial systems and insatiable investment spree – was linked to the Capitalist System. In addition, the forceful anti-religion campaigns perpetuated by the communist regimes for nearly a half century in many parts of the world were certainly symptomatic of a void in the human psyche of its other dimension of spirituality.

This socio-economic duality entrenched in the competition between the political ideologies perpetuated by both systems has further exacerbated the deep chasm between what material and nonmaterial values are built into the institutional life and individual behaviour of contemporary society. Sivaraksa is of the view that such have impacted on his own world in Thailand. He indicates that an ideological residue continues to manifest itself in different forms in most developing countries. Aloysius Pieris, commenting on

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Sivaraksa's approach, reiterates that a 'possible Asian method of development and liberation must use the tools of social analysis in conjunction with the techniques of psychological introspection proper to Asian tradition' (see Ref. 8, p. 40). Venerable Rahula explains lucidly what Pieris identifies here as psychological introspection in order to base and train oneself in the Buddhist scheme of thought and practice, which is a possible recipe for non-material value formation and conduct in the public sphere. Rahula states that:

> there are two qualities that one should develop equally: compassion (*karuna*) on one side, and wisdom (*panna*) on the other. Here compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance and such noble qualities on the emotional side, or qualities of the heart, while wisdom would stand for the intellectual side or the qualities of the mind. If one develops only the emotional neglecting the intellectual, one may become a good-hearted fool; while to develop only the intellectual side neglecting the emotional may turn one into a hard-hearted intellect without the feeling for others. (See Ref. 6, p. 46)

Compassion penetrates all reality and conditions. It draws goodness in the recipient and considers no boundaries but deeply challenges the disturbing effects of conflict and violence. Compassion gives credibility to wisdom to act with affirmative discernment but with a soft touch. While compassion is risky, it plunges deep into the material with its unassuming non-material discourse, to effect change within.

Wisdom in the Buddhist idiom is discerned within the human predicament, a craving to amass limitless wealth, together with its associated greed (*lobha*), and it prepares action worthy of attention and discourse. It enhances goodness and finds alternatives to defeat dysfunctional behaviour and distinguishes between extremes by opting for the middle path (*majjhima patipada*). It animates discourse between the proposition and the opposition in the public realm and creates a drive to fight poverty, cope with economic risks and promote social responsibility. Hence, Buddhist discernment pivots itself consciously on its pragmatically woven middle ground to provide individuals, communities, institutions and societies to develop non-material values skilfully in order to mobilise the material in useful ways.

Religious traditions, institutionally and due to each of their internal pressures, have prioritised and over-emphasised the concept of compassion or love as fundamental to the spiritual quality that one needs to pursue, and have sidelined and neglected the value of developing wisdom. It is utterly futile for people to develop themselves as good-hearted fools, or as kind people but with little or no understanding or ability for introspection, losing much learning in life skills. Other systems of thought and approaches to life and dimensions of understanding of reality, such as science, views that wisdom can best be developed when all emotions, including compassion, are kept aloof at all levels of inquiry and pursuit. Such approaches, such as science**,** tend to become preoccupied with result-orientated values only, and seem to abandon the basis of scientific inquiry that ought to be oriented primarily in the service of society and not to dominate society and its well being. Evidence shows that some scientists have lent their skills to developing nuclear arsenals and high tech weapons of mass destruction, making a mockery of their intelligence at the expense of non-material values. Religious pursuits on the other hand have edged themselves on a fault line with reason and wisdom, and even considered an

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enemy of emotions like love and faith. Empirical inquiry and scientific investigations tend to categorise emotions such as love and faith as inimical of reason and objectivity. Such dichotomies have evoked 'us and them', 'a paradigm of oppositionality', which is unhelpful for any form of healthy debate and constructive reasoning.

The Enlightenment view was that as science progresses and expands human reasoning, religion declines and would disappear, which has proven to be a simplistic view of a plural world. The Buddhist proposition on the other hand, emulates that to be a truly balanced and complete individual, one could develop both wisdom and compassion, which is a practice-based entry into a world of objectivity and introspection. The reasoning that underpins the Buddhist scheme of thought is that it bypasses dogmatism and bases itself on experience of inquiry and pursuit of the final release. Hence, science and its method of inquiry are considered helpful in so far as they lead one to ethical conduct and wholesome living. Material wellbeing in Buddhist thought is considered valuable in itself so long as it leads human beings and communities to act and function in a wholesome manner engaging in social, political, economic and other aspects of life with considered wisdom and abiding compassion.

Gross Domestic Production (GDP) and Gross National Happiness (GNH) debate

The term GNH was coined in 1972 by Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the late King Bhutan who was instrumental in paving the way to the age of modernisation of Bhutan. After the demise of his father, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck revisited the phrase his father coined to make his own commitment to developing an economy that would support Bhutan's unique cultural heritage based on Buddhist ethical and spiritual values. The initial impetus carried the royal patronage; however, it was the Centre for Bhutan Studies that led the concept to gather momentum under the able leadership of Kaarma Uru. He developed a sophisticated survey instrument to measure peoples' general level of well-being. He was well supported by Michael Pennock, a Canadian epidemiologist who designed and shaped a possible universal application of the instrument.

What subsequently happened was quite interesting. The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) was developed and expanded to define an indicator that can measure quality of life or social progress in more holistic and psychological terms than Gross Domestic Production. It is a fact that GDP is a key economic indicator and has a very important task in measuring and projecting the economic life of a population without which it would be suicidal to be an active economic unit. However, it does not mean that the numerous flaws the GDP carried are unknown to economists around the globe. 'GDP measures the amount of commerce in a country, but counts remedial and defensive expenditures (such as the costs of security, police, pollution clean up, etc.) as positive contributions to commerce'.[9] This measurement is crucial for the economic projection of a population, especially in the case of a natural disaster, and to avert a serious economic depression and other related economic and fiscal calamities, such as the one that recently occurred. But a holistic measure of economic well-being could include other non-market benefits, such as volunteer work at all levels, care provided by the family members to a

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considerable economically inactive and increasingly large elderly population, unpaid domestic work, faith-based charitable social project involvement, and un-priceable ecosystem services. Such a measure would suggest a new indicator, not just measuring economic growth but also its impact on the population, and measuring the well-being, and happiness of this population, which is also fundamental to economic growth and its sustainability. In the 1980s the French undersea explorer and avid environmentalist Jacques Yves Cousteau declared against the global fixation on GDP growth that implied all consumption was good even if it meant dooming future generations to a declining quality of life or no life at all. The true measure of prosperity, he says, should be based on a broader understanding of 'happiness' even if this sounded like a 'crazy idea'.

The European Union Conference on 'Beyond GDP'[10] has bravely embarked on conversing about the danger of just relying on the GDP as the only measuring tool for economic growth, ecological footprint or social investment. The conference brought together high-level experts and policy makers to address these critical issues. This gathering in Brussels in 2007 sent a strong message to governments and economists, demographers and city planners, think tanks and policy makers, religious institutions and social entrepreneurs, financial institutions, fiscal projections and international network of Nongovernmental Organisations,[11] to get 'Beyond GDP' in order to measure progress, not as the mere increase in commercial transactions, nor as an increase in specifically economic well-being, but as an increase in general well-being as people themselves subjectively report it. In early 2008, French president Nicholas Sarkozy, with the effects of the financial crisis, brought together Nobel laureates Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen with French economist Jean-Paul Fitoussi and about 20 others for a Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (which looks like a clear attempt to bring together the conversation between material progress and non-material values). Its report, issued in 2009, emphatically declares 'the time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's wellbeing.'

The Gross National Happiness index is a strong contributor to this movement to discard measurements of commercial transactions as the only key indicator. Instead, to assess directly the changes in the social and psychological well-being of populations would be equally an acceptable measurement of both GDP and GNH to a considerable proportion. The European Commission, as if to strike a balance in this debate, produced a policy paper in August 2009, 'GDP and Beyond: Measuring Progress in a Changing World'. In September of the same year they made a broadcast via the electronic media stipulating some decisive and thoughtful recommendations[12] with a binding effect on its membership. It is interesting how the Western states and experts are looking into the same phenomenon of sufficiency but from the position of analysis of their own economic and fiscal status quo in order to redesign their models as desirable and sustainable.

Like many psychological and social indicators, GNH is obviously somewhat easier to state than to define with mathematical precision. Nonetheless, it serves as a unifying vision for Bhutan's five-year planning process and all the derived planning documents that guide the economic and development plans of the country. Proposed policies in Bhutan must pass a GNH review based on a GNH impact statement that is similar in

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nature to the Environmental Impact Statement required for strategic development plans in any environmentally conscious governance procedures.

The Bhutanese basis and its conceptualisation in Buddhist ideals suggest that wholesome development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occur side by side to complement and reinforce each other. It is interesting how, just as in four Buddhist 'sublime abidings' (*cattaro brahmavihara*),[13] the GNH index advocates four pillars as it wishes to promote sustainable development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment, and establishment of good governance. The European Union's 2009 recommendations on 'Beyond GDP' is indeed close to the Bhutanese proposition but based on their close-to-home measuring tool. The concept of GNH is transcultural as advocated by the four pillars that are both inspirational and operational in very different contexts. Hence, a nation need not be Buddhist in order to value sustainable development, cultural integrity, ecosystem conservation, and good governance, but the Buddhist approach may be helpful in seeing the bigger picture of societal behaviours.

Challenges in the public sphere

The new Millennium dawned with the euphoria of triumphalism, as if the liberal economic agenda and the market-led international trade and financial speculation would solve the problems of the world. The Market led-ideology advocated that it was the Marxist view of society and Communist view of political and social engineering that dented the true progress and growth of the world. This upbeat generic socio-political victory, with the dramatic fall of the Berlin Wall, in fact indicated that something new was about to take place. The socio-political murmuring in the public sphere was positive and optimistic. The thinking behind this prosperous outlook was further galvanised by the thoughts and ideas of the late Samuel Huntington,[14] and the 'converted Neocon',[15] Francis Fukuyama[16] in the political corridors of the United States. The 'new Europe' in the post-communist era with its triumphal rapture perhaps was undecided with its own initial hesitations around the Maastricht treaty and the new membership drawn into the Union. It must be said that the public sphere was full of discussions and heated arguments as to who might be the power house driving the global political agenda. With blowback effects, the new emerging power blocks have shifted from the traditional North American and European economic centres to the global South, with China particularly making its potential economic growth felt both within the region and outside its known borders.

It is a fact that the 9/11 atrocities committed on US soil, as well as conflicts in other parts of the world alongside the major military activities in Iraq and Afghanistan, have changed the way states and governments assess and act on their domestic and regional security, and border controls. Debate, discussions and argumentative rhetoric dominated the public sphere in the current decade and continue in full scale from political leadership in Washington, and Westminster, to the market places across the globe. The electronic media has also paved the way for such discourses to prevail even though coherent debates are hard to find. However, many voices are heard more than ever before. Pressures on the world's political leadership to evolve strategies to contain unrest and

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community frustrations have been immense. Religious institutions are challenged to engage not only with their 'own flock' but also to relate to others who are not of their tradition. Religious groups are compelled to assess their stand as contributors to develop societies and communities. The (in)famous slogan, 'religiously-inspired violence' or premeditated acts of terror, which are 'religiously motivated', have all contributed to a global terror-psychosis. Nations, religious groups, regions, institutions and individuals have been labelled as the 'other' in the aftermath of colossal human cruelty of this decade. This 'other' is portrayed as needing to be feared, which is unhelpful to decent living with civility. The public sphere involves these intertwined and complicated discourses with political and culturally different strands yet to be untangled. Religious persuasions can no longer be a private affair of an individual, or a practice that just involves that specific community. Religion has become too public to be privatised; attempts to make it private normally ends up in bad publicity.

Jürgen Habermas sheds light and extensively speaks of the public role of religion. He perhaps disassociates with that which is 'bad' religion and proposes to deal with 'good' and rational religion. One can identify then that suicide in the name of an ideological paradigm inspired from within a religious persuasion cannot be justified as part of a 'good' religion as it both destroys the witness to 'good' religion and derails its wider subscription and the participation in the civil society. The tragedy of the current spiral of violence is that it also takes place in the very public sphere that 'good' religion functions and is alive within. Life, death and ultimate pursuits are what religious traditions attempt to respond to and they are tested over and over again as they are dumbstruck with the callous use of violence by groups of religious adherents who claim that they protect 'God's interest'. Habermasian rethinking of the public role of religion portrays it as a vehicle for dialogue about how its fundamental non-material approach to life might interact in the wider society with other approaches to existence and rationality. Habermas currently talks about the emergence of 'post-secular societies' and argues that tolerance[17] is a two-way street: secular people need to tolerate the role of religious people in the public square and vice versa.[18] In the Istanbul Seminars 2008, Habermas observes that religious groups can be 'communities of interpretation'[18] in the public arena of secular societies. The healthy debate between the material and non-material can only bring what is good in both. This critical conversation is conspicuously absent in most areas as both contenders' aim has been to convince the other of what one thinks and that what the other holds is a degeneration of both what is rational and that which deals with everyday life and practice. Basically to 'convert' the other to one's own agenda, has been proved time and time again as unproductive and unsustainable.

Buddhism, in fact, proposes what Habermas tries to articulate, that if someone or a group of people of high moral ground were to say that, 'this alone is true, all else is false' (*idam eva saccam amogham annam*)[19] then such a position indicates an infatuation with the uncompromising 'rightness' of one's own views (*sanditthi raga*) (see Ref. 19, *gatha* 175) and dogmatic attachment (*ditthi paramasa*).[20] The conversation between the material objectives and the non-material values can happen and does happen but requires rigorous pursuit and trustworthiness on the part of those who wish to achieve what they desire for a world of pragmatism with wisdom and radical compassion.

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Sufficiency consciousness: A learning curve

The option for 'sufficiency consciousness' is a radical move from certain consumerist behaviour patterns of limitless craving to achieve, succeed, earn and invest in a competitive mode of a pure-result orientated methodology. It is an option to evolve parameters to understand and realise the folly of absolutism and the single narrative agenda, which seem to push certain beleaguered sections of the world to hold some others to ransom. It is a position to deconstruct the 'us' and 'them' as notions of knowing reality and functioning based on either preconceived perceptions, pure prejudice propaganda or unfounded fear. Sufficiency consciousness combines wisdom and compassion to ascertain that religious affairs have always been staged in the secular realm and would be scrutinised if such institutions fail to live up to its code of conduct, which could result in the infringement of especially those who are vulnerable and voiceless.[21] The invitation for sufficiency consciousness is a sustained call to transfer human activity to a middle ground and realise that states and cities encourage their citizens' in full economic, social, cultural and political participation. Sufficiency consciousness dethrones all centralising tendencies of totalitarian and fascist thought towards active participation in the dialectics of the public sphere. It is a proposition for a face-to-face interaction between the material and the non-material, a healthy sign of 'radical democracy' (Habermas) with wisdom and compassion, which is a Buddhist approach to deal with both international issues to daily activities.

This paper draws some inspiration from the 'Thai Development experiment' just as in the case of the Bhutanese proposition (GNH) to its people, as discussed previously, to argue the sufficiency consciousness as a significant facet of the debate around material enhancement and the non-physical-value sustainability as a catalyst for authentic social change and mobilisation of civil society sectors. The Thailand Human Development Report 2007: *Sufficiency Economy and Human Development*, published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is the result of a year-long collaboration between Thai and international experts, and the contribution of many Thai officials and academics committed to bringing *Sufficiency Economy* thinking to a wider audience.

The UNDP Report hails the 'Thai Middle Path', as key to fighting poverty, coping with economic risk and promoting corporate social responsibility, as Thailand's response to globalisation. The sufficiency economy philosophy[22] is based on the principles of moderation, reasonableness and self-immunity. It is a set of tools and principles that help communities, corporations and governments manage globalisation – maximising its benefits and minimising its costs – by making wise decisions that promote sustainable development, equity, and resilience against shocks. As such, Sufficiency Economy is a much needed 'survival strategy' in a world of economic uncertainty and environmental threats. This is a set of tools that can be used by governments, civil society groups and individuals to work towards sustainable growth, environmental protection and a better quality of life for all. This report explains what Sufficiency Economy means in practice: as communities and principles are fundamental to empowerment and building resilience.

The report suggests to governments that Sufficiency Economy is central to alleviating poverty, promoting good governance, and guiding macroeconomic policies to immunise

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against shocks. The report argues that rather than invest in large-scale top-down initiatives to combat poverty, governments should support communities in their own self-help schemes, conserve the environment, promote sustainable development, and maintain a stable macroeconomic course that minimises risks. The report points out that corruption is the enemy of all these efforts, and that the poor and vulnerable are often the first victims of poor governance. It is to the credit of this development model that the two international bodies, UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and the UNDP, held in high esteem the proposition of sufficiency economy which this paper suggests, and which in fact is based on a sufficiency consciousness theory that has its roots in a non-material value paradigm – in religious thought to be deployed in post-secular contexts. This is no place for religious evangelism anymore, instead religions and religious groups now attempt to learn and to live in unfamiliar contexts with familiar responses in versions that can appeal to the future generations.

The middle ground, when practised at the level of the individuals, families and communities, as well as collectively in the choice of a balanced national development strategy, will provide a firm foundation for all in standing up to the excessive consumption and accumulation spree. It means moderation in all human endeavours, reining in expectations within the bounds of self-support and self-reliance, having enough to live on. It lessens human proneness to the extremes and excesses, both in our insatiable appetite for wealth and wasteful consumption, which marked the period leading up to crisis after crisis.

'Sufficiency' consciousness is a learning process towards moderation and could be the means by which the sail of interdependence can be trimmed and adjusted so as to prevent the boat from capsizing as a result of over-dependence. We have all seen how over-dependence can make us extremely vulnerable to the whims of international capital, which, on its part was not immune to the influence of the herd instinct. 'Sufficiency' consciousness seeks to strengthen the symbiosis and harmony between the material and the non-material. The intense growth-oriented strategy**,** which led to the rapid depletion of environmental assets priced cheaply below their replacement cost**,** is something that can be reversed if the communities and policy makers are willing to learn from the 'sufficiency' consciousness process, from daily household grocery purchase to international trade to global investment agenda. It is honesty and integrity that is fundamental to strengthening the ethical fibre of states and maintaining their GDP in balance with public officials, policy makers, theorists and business sectors involved in material enhancement but not neglecting the non-physical values that underpin the 'soul of society'.

Concluding comments

David Edwards in his timely book in the late 1990s elaborated,

> In my view it is compassion that marks the difference between mainstream and dissent, between the clichés of conformity and liberating insight, between a murderous status quo and change, between despair and hope… Recognising this great value (non material) of compassionate understanding, Buddhism takes us in all our laughable self-importance, greediness and irascibility, and declares that even we can work on ourselves to increase our compassion … In the process, we are told we will experience freedom.[23]

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Buddhism identifies *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hatred) and *moha* (delusion) as the root causes of all forms of behaviour. A Zen teacher, David Loy, suggests that the human possibility and the ability to transform these lurking tendencies of greed into generosity, ill-will into loving kindness and delusion into wisdom do exist.[24] This transformative injunction is an open invitation to effect change in the individual as well as in society at large.

An unarticulated 'cold war' between material and non-material philosophies has been around far too long and proved to be futile, just as in the case of pre-1989 in the geo-political world of international relations. Habermas, in no uncertain terms, reiterates that 'religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernisation is losing ground'.[25] Then he warns that both the 'sole material enhancement proponents' and the 'non material value based groups' that, 'above all, three overlapping phenomena converge to create the impression of a worldwide "resurgence of religion": the missionary expansion, a fundamentalist radicalisation, and the political instrumentalisation of the potential for violence innate in many of the world religions'.[25] The proposal here is for middle-ground thinking and adopting a behaviour that is in par with other centres of gravity in human activity primarily never to abandon critical viewing of what is presented and what is being asked to perform.

As the reader realises by now, the aim of this paper was not to explore the role of religion in the institutional adjustment of society, even though such has been attempted in the history of various religious traditions. The paper however reiterates that secular institutions can certainly adopt a 'sufficiency' consciousness strategy, as Buddhism does not claim that it is solely a Buddhist contribution. It inquires, analyses and makes recommendations to the human predicament of greed (*lobha*), a defilement, a craving for accumulation without limits or borders which indicates a serious moral deficit and possibly a social canker in human behaviour. Secular institutions need to develop within themselves an ethical disposition so that a material development with a human face can be achieved with openness to non-material values. However, the dangers are already evident when firms and companies push hard and squeeze just for growth and productivity, as if these are the end result of human longing.[26] The combination of an openness of a workforce in a given institution with an innovative openness for material development would increase their quality of life, which obviously can enhance the productivity of the whole. Such mutuality can bring deep appreciation for non-material values in the processes of material development.

Religions by their very composition cannot be opposed to material development if they are about peoples' well being, progress and happiness. It is a fact that there are vital distinctions between Buddhism and other religions; for example Judaism, Christianity and Islam are theistic persuasions, while Buddhism (one could also include Jainism) is a non-theistic tradition. These religious movements approached development, progress and productivity differently as each of the philosophical, historical and institutional moorings were unique to each. Christianity certainly is full of examples of a 'sufficiency' consciousness methodology if one were to traverse through its corridors of history. From Jesus of Nazareth to Francis of Assisi, it can be described as a religio-cultural attempt to return to the roots of each of their traditions (Jewish and Christian) to pursue renewal and moral conduct. The Christian monastic tradition, from Benedict to Charles de Foucault,

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has elements of social protests to extreme materiality to maintain in its own aims of 'sufficiency' within its communities. In addition, the Liberation theology movement of the 1960s, which sprung from the Latino world, was a response to 'sufficiency' against the aggressiveness and the excessiveness of the American model of development, progress and governance. The problem of an uncritical liberal dream of progress and material development is when one makes one's dream one's value in practical living in human activity. Dreaming is what inspires the individual but one should cultivate a set of values to achieve the dream. The material is inspired by the non-material and the non-material is made practical by the appropriate use of material. This interplay is integral to any form of development and progress.

The Christian tradition in all its diversity is more publicly practiced in the US than by the modern Europeans. If one were to carefully read the US presidential presentations on every single American national deliberation, they portray, and what they defend, from George Washington to Barack Obama, is the constitution and the liberty won by their forefathers, and not necessarily the country's religious traditions. America's 'core religious tradition' is its constitution, which was formed with astute rigour. This constitution might have had a religious influence in its formative years. What the constitution promotes is a possibility for an individual to raise him or herself from the ashes to the reach one's high ideals – the American dream. So to achieve that dream is to be successful, and such is an American core value and that is how that society functions.

The clash of material and non-material values is back on track once again since the recent collapse of the financial institutions, and has become more pertinent as China approaches its turn of leading progress and economic activity at a global scale. Whether this emerging world power is able to emulate the non-material values inherited through the religious philosophies of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism is yet to be ascertained. China is neither an immigrant society nor does it have a socio-political glue like the American constitution. It will be interesting to see what China proposes and attempts with regard to progress, prosperity and how it intends to handle material development in the face of challenging ecological issues. It seems now that it is China's chance to join in the global leadership circle but its challenge would be, on one hand progress and development, while on the other hand to be alert to a set of non-material values so that its own poor and the world's needy might have the basic needs fulfilled. Such a desire to make the world's millions of needy included in the progress and development agenda could be a workable combination of material and the non-material values in global planning, economic designs and corporate imagination – an extraordinary gift of leadership for governance.

Religious traditions are key catalysts in society – in Habermasian terms 'religion has a role in society' though not necessarily as 'truth distributors' – but their rediscovered role may be recognised in the public sphere. It is necessary to transcend the rivalry between religious and secular camps and forge fresh ways of debating what is to be valued as public truth in order to display rational thinking and an epistemological honesty that would lead to a renewed self-understanding. Non-material values are innate in order to create a happy and meaningful life, but by themselves they are insufficient. 'Sufficiency' consciousness is an invitation to both camps to adopt moderation and reasonableness in the public sphere.

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References and Notes

1. The term meaning 'otherness' (Emmanuel Lévinas) strictly being in the sense of the other of two. It is generally understood as the philosophical principle of expressing one's own view for that of the 'other', more popularised in a series of essays under the title *Alterity and Transcendence*. See M. B. Smith (1999/1983) *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press). Later scholarship develops this idea as construction of 'cultural others' in G. C. Spivak, R. Guha, H. Bhabha, H. Dabashi, A. Nandy and Balagangadhara (1988) *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
2. A. Race (2007) Religion in public life, a non-violent path to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In: K. Mofid, A. Acikgenc, K. J. Mcinley and S. Salur (eds) *Globalisation for the Common Good Conference*, Istanbul 5–9 July 2007 (Fatih University Press, 2008), p. 189.
3. See. R. D. Tollison and T. D. Willet (1973) International integration and the interdependence of economic variables. *International Organisation*, **7**(3), 255–271.
4. ISI was created in the 1990s as the world's first measure of the ability of 53 countries to participate in the information revolution, see www.idc.com/groups.isi/main/html [accessed 1 April 2010].
5. http://www.idc.com/groups/isi/main.html [accessed 2 April 2010].
6. Walpola Rahula in fact refers to an important Buddhist text – W. Rahula (1954–59) *The Book of Middle Length Sayings* 3 volumes (Bristol: Pali Text Society) p. 301. See also W. Rahula (1996) *What the Buddha Taught* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications), p. 46.
7. A. Pieris (1996) *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, Faith meets Faiths series (Colombo: Orbis Books Maryknoll) (first edition 1988), pp. 65–67.
8. S. Sivaraksa (1972) Religion and development. *Dialogue*, **3**(2), p. 52.
9. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/10/opinion/10zencey.html [accessed 2 April 2010].
10. This unique conference was held on 19–20 November 2007. The European Commission, European Parliament, Club of Rome, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) hosted this high-level conference with the objectives of clarifying which indices are most appropriate to measure progress, and how these can best be integrated into the decision-making process and taken up by public debate. Over 500 people from economic, social and environmental spheres attended.
11. These papers took centre stage of the 'Beyond GDP' conference in Brussels in November 2007. They indicate the messages it wished to convey to a wide range of people that matter: 'GDP is no longer a good measure of well-being', 'GDP ''outdated'' as an indicator of wellbeing: there's more to life than GDP (but not much more)', 'Does money buy happiness? Can wellbeing be measured?' Does growth equal progress?', 'Wealth and well-being.'
12. The five key actions support the Commission's aims to develop indicators relevant to the challenges of today – ones that provide an improved basis for public discussion and policy-making. (i) Complementing GDP with environmental and social indicators; (ii) near real-time information for decision-making; (iii) more accurate reporting on distribution and inequalities; (iv) developing a European sustainable development scoreboard; (v) extending National Accounts to environmental and social issues. This position indeed indicates a significantly alternative way to work considering the fragile economies and social deficits on the increase at the global level.
13. The Four Sublime States (*Cattaro Brahmavihara*): (i) *metta* (loving kindness); (ii) *karuna* (compassion); (iii) *mudita* (sympathetic joy or rejoicing at others'

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happiness and prosperity); (iv) *upekkha* (equanimity). Keeping these sublime states in mind, will all beings be happy.

14. In his article 'Clash of civilisation, remaking of the New World Order', published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in 1993, Samuel P Huntington made headlines in American politics and provoked great debate among international relation theorists and proponents in his description of post-Cold War geopolitics, which contrasted with the influential 'End of History' thesis advocated by Francis Fukuyama. Huntington expanded his piece to book length and published it as *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone) in 1996. The article and the book posit that post-Cold War conflict would most frequently and violently occur because of cultural rather than ideological differences.
15. Neo conservatism is a political philosophy that emerged in the United States of America, and which supports using American economic and military power to bring liberalism, democracy, and human rights to other countries. Such a position has been proven unsustainable time and time again. I use the word 'converted' because of the change his ideas since 2002 and alongside his endorsement of Barak Obama in the 2008 presidential election and the distancing of himslef all together from the previous Republican administration.
16. F. Fukuyama's controversial book from 1992, *End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books) expands on his 1989 essay *The End of History?* published in the international affairs journal *The National Interest*. Fukuyama argues that the advent of Western liberal democracy may signal the end point of humanity's socio-cultural evolution and the final form of human government.
17. The word 'tolerance', I would not use as it contains some effort by the parties concerned in order to bear the good, bad and the ugly of the other party because there is no other option. Hence, the word loses what it wishes to convey. The alternative phrase might be 'respect for opposite opinion' which one can maintain with certain mutual trustworthiness.
18. J. Habermas (2008) What do we mean by 'post-secular' society? Paper presented by the author at the Istanbul Seminars organized by Reset Dialogues on Civilizations in Istanbul from 2–6 June 2008 see http://www.resetdoc.org/story/ for his long discussion.
19. *Suttanipata* (sn), PTS, *gatha* 457.
20. *Dhammasangani* (Dhs) PTS, para 1498.
21. One such case is the ecclesiastical paedophile scandal of the Roman Catholic tradition, which has embarrassed its own high moral ground and is under scrutiny by what is known as secular institutions standardising the good the right practice in order that there is transparency and accountability to protect the vulnerable individuals in society. This debate is at its peak at the time of writing this paper.
22. The idea of sufficiency economy philosophy is succinctly summarised in M. Krongkaew (2000) The philosophy of sufficiency economy, http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/issue/issue3/article_292.html, [accessed 5 April 2010]. The idea was first developed by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the King of Thailand. It caught the imagination beyond the national context, when the international community at the tenth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) acclaimed 'Sufficiency Economy', February 2000, which expressly recognised His Majesty as 'the Developer King'.
23. D. Edwards (1998) *The Compassionate Revolution: Radical Politics and Buddhism* (Devon: Green Books), p. 11.
24. D. Loy (2003) *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Boston: Wisdom Publications). Here Loy explains in detail how Buddhism can help the contemporary

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world develop 'liberative' possibilities otherwise obscured by the anti-religious bias of so much contemporary social theory.

25. See J. Habermas , A 'post-secular' society – what does that mean? Istanbul Seminar series, http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000000926, [accessed 5 April 2010].
26. According to the Capital Economics (US based think tank), the figures from the second quarter of 2010, the American firms cannot squeeze any more productivity from their workers – a 3.6% increase in the US employee hours worked, with only 2.6% increase in the US employee output. This is a 0.9% decline in US employee productivity, the first decrease since the financial crisis began. This shift has caused a 0.2% increase in unit labour costs to the firm. See. 'Hitting the limits', *Newsweek* (Asia Edition) 23 and 30 August 2010, p. 9.

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