

## Editorial

# RELIGIOUS INTERFACE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR PEOPLE

The *Journal of Dharma*, from its inception, understands religion as “one of the deepest dimensions of culture” and is committed to “disseminate the seeds of the Sacred in every bit of our secular existence and to re-integrate the entire material Universe in the Spirit of Truth and Holiness” (Vadakethala and Chethimattom). Continuing the tradition, volume 47 in 2022 investigates the interface between Religion and Development. In tune with the focus of the Global Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the *Journal of Dharma* explores the relationship between ‘Religion,’ the most ancient and ever new dimension of humanity, and ‘Development,’ the mantra of the industrialised and industrialising world and an essential feature of the secular today. People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships are presented as the Five Pillars of the 2030 Agenda for transforming our world. It is a call and commitment for all to live sustainably, individually and globally, keeping in mind the wisdom that our planet is a common home for all living beings and is on loan from our children rather than a gift from our ancestors.

Though human beings are always involved in a quest for development, market-driven scientific and technological developments often work against the peace and prosperity of the people and the planet. Even when we enjoy the fruits of science and technology, we realise reluctantly that they are unsustainable and unethical, with destructive power for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. States, corporations, and secular agencies evaluate development by measuring the GDP achieved through technological innovation, market reforms, and military power. Together with the money power, most of the ‘developed’ nations hold military power so much so that the development is measured against money power and military power.

Religions envision development that goes beyond money and military powers to holistic development, which integrates ethics and values, leading to sustainable prosperity and peace for people and the planet. Religions insist on moral power that leads to happiness and harmony. They critique the contemporary culture that is obsessed with material development, provide alternative stories for integral and holistic well-being, and strive to bring peace and prosperity to the people and planet through partnerships.

The development slogan has to address the cry for inter- and intra-generational and inter-species justice. The secular humanist world was often merely a cover story for the technocratic market society and corporate world, which are driven by the lust for power and profit, resulting in the increase of inequalities and exploitations among the people and nations and immense danger to many species for their very survival. The world that is currently characterised by the uncertainties and insecurities of globalisation, as well as the emerging fourth industrial revolution, needs to regain its social and planetary face, and it is impossible without the support of religious traditions and indigenous wisdom. A vast majority of people are religious believers, and religions are important partners and agents in the Global Agenda to transform the world, bringing peace and prosperity to the people and the planet through partnerships. We need effective partnerships between development and religion “to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace” (Earth Charter).

In a world of mass human migration and ever faster dissemination of ideas and images, no fact of human life is independent of either religious influence or development. In a world of specialisations, the saga of development often considers the religious roots irrelevant and sometimes harmful. However, it is also to be acknowledged that most human beings find religions important today, even in the wake of scientific, technological, and economic development. However, along with the re-emergence of religion, believers are baffled by the uprising of fundamental divisive and narrow ideologies that subvert the global agenda for prosperity and peace for people and the planet. It is a fact that

religions can cause, promote, oppose, or stand in the way of development. As Agenda 2030 also reminds everyone: "We can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet. The world will be a better place in 2030 if we succeed in our objectives" (50). And the achievement of SDGs is impossible without the active partnerships of various religious and indigenous traditions.

From a religious point of view, there are no facts of the secular that are not influenced by the sacred, and the sacred aspects of human life are influenced directly or indirectly by the secular fields of human life. At a time when the convictions of millions of believers do so much to shape the well-being of humanity on the planet, it is wrong to discount them as misguided delusions. The great experiences and insights of religious traditions of humanity are important sources of knowledge, and to ignore them would be an unacceptable policing by academia, economics, and politics. Rejecting the fruits of science, technology, democracy, and globalisation are also delusional.

In the Preamble of the SDG Agenda, we read: "We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment." People are the focus of the SDGs, especially the first five goals (Poverty SDG 1, Zero Hunger SDG 2, Good Health and Well-being SDG 3, Quality Education SDG 4, and Gender Equality SDG 5), deal directly with the fundamental needs and well-being of people. Global poverty is a severe problem, interlinked with hunger, health, education, and gender equality. The poorest in the world are often hungry, sick, and illiterate, and the women and children suffer and are discriminated against more. Making progress against poverty is a matter of prime importance for all. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is committed to leaving no one behind, focussing "on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind" (74e)

Religions play significant roles in eradicating poverty by providing basic human needs – food, water, health, and education. Religious organisations provide more than half of the educational

and a third of the medical facilities to people worldwide. Though often accused of human rights violations and discrimination against women, religions today contribute significantly towards promoting human rights and women empowerment. As Pope Francis observed, “we need to think of ourselves more and more as a single family dwelling in a common home” (17).

The first entry in this issue of the Journal on “Religion and Development for People” is a piece of creative writing, “Reality: A Philosophical Poem” by John Clark Smith. The poem begins with the simple and profound observation that

Reality has no borders.  
Humans thought borders  
and made territories.  
In reality,  
no lines separate.  
All of it belongs to all.

In the concluding section, the author challenges the readers to “Welcome reality.”

Xing Wang, in the following article, “‘Feminist’ Buddhism and Women Empowerment from a Contemporary Chinese Perspective,” shows that certain Buddhists in mainland China deny the possibility of launching a Western-like ‘Feminist’ purge of Buddhism and argue that for sustainable development of Buddhism and Chinese society, Buddhist traditions should not be put in the opposite to gender equality. Rather than seeing the rise of ‘Feminist’ critique of Buddhism in mainland China and Taiwan as homogeneous to Western feminist movements in religion, this article reveals the diverse approaches of Chinese Buddhist elites to reconcile gender equality issues with Chinese Buddhist doctrines and other traditions in China.

“Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali vis-à-vis Sustainable Development Goals” by Pradeep Kumar Sahoo and A. K. Behura explores the possibility of Patanjali’s *Ashtanga Yoga* in providing solutions to the challenges posed by modern-day psychological, economic, and political problems. The paper investigates the interlinking actions of individuals with global concerns and how individuals can help achieve Universal Peace and make the planet earth

environmentally healthy by 2030, by adopting the yogic principles. Individuals have inherent roles in the makeup of the cosmic order.

19<sup>th</sup> century Japan is a representative example of the diffusion of education and enlightened knowledge, improving people's quality of life. Do-hyung Kim, in "Civilisation Development and Religion in Modern Japan," explores the Japanese Enlightenment debate over the relationship between religion and enlightenment knowledge. Some of the Japanese enlightenment authors tried to use religion as a tool for accepting civilisation, while others argued that it was necessary to understand religion correctly for the development of civilisation. Nishi Amane argued that correct knowledge could be established by separating and coexisting the area of knowledge and religion and pursuing the policy of religion for civilisation development.

Taoism and the sustainable development of human settlements have many things in common. The article, "Inheritance and Enlightenment of Sustainable Human Settlements under the Taoist Holistic View" by Luhui Qi, first explains the Taoist holistic view from two perspectives: i. individuals and countries, and ii. nature and society. And then, it expounds on the unique values formed under the Taoist holistic view through the ontology, methodology, and values of Taoism. Next, it elaborates on the relation of Taoism and the sustainable development of contemporary human settlements to show the transcendence and forward-looking nature of Chinese Taoist thinking. Finally, it analyses the intrinsic holistic value and China's 'community of life' theory to show the inheritance and development of Taoism in contemporary times.

"Minding Illness: Toward a Philosophy of Health" by Raheema Thasneem and Vinod Balakrishnan revisits the phenomenology of illness by analysing competing health philosophies deeply rooted in human experience. The non-clinical approach of the paper de-essentialises the experience of illness, juxtaposing two opposing perspectives on illness: one, Edmund Pellegrino's, in which the body is the centre of all experiences, and the other that of Philipose Mar Chrysostom, which moves beyond mere wellness of the human body to propose an alternative bioethical position which emphasises the role of the mind in the act of healing.

Appreciating cultural diversity is the seventh target of Quality Education (SDG 4). Although connections worldwide are increasing, cultural diversity among people has become challenging. Islam sees cultural disparity as natural; *al-'adl* (non-bias), the central concept of Islamic ethics not only promotes cultural appreciation but makes it compulsory for just leadership. Mohammad Ismath Ramzy, Rahimi Md Saad, and Abdul Muhsien Sulaiman, in their paper, "Religious Ethics for Appreciating Cultural Diversity," explores the association between *al-'adl* and cultural appreciation in Islamic religious texts and its implication in history, highlighting the obligatory stance of Islam on cultural diversity appreciation in a multicultural context. The researchers recommend that Islamic religious leaders and religious institutions promote cultural appreciation as a fundamental obligation to ensure justice (*al-'adl*) in a society.

Acknowledging with gratitude the researchers who responded to the vision of a sustainable world and investigated the interface of religion and development for the well-being of people and the planet, and sharing the hope that all of us will take decisions for a sustainable future for all, may I submit this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* on "Religion and Development for People" for your reading, reflection, and action.

Jose Nandhikkara  
Editor-in-Chief

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