



Satta Aparihāniya Dhamma for Social Peace and Harmony

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Abstract

The Satta Aparihāniya Dhamma (SAD) provides teachings on ethical, moral, cultural, psychological and social aspects that aid in fostering peace and harmony. Harmony is defined as a state of agreement and understanding among individuals, groups and nations that everyone should possess as it fosters peace and reduces conflicts. Although the seven conditions of welfare are taught for the Vajjians by the Buddha, those principles are relevant to contemporary society and nation too for its development. The study focuses on the psychological aspect of SAD for developing peace and harmony. It is a qualitative research where analytical and descriptive method has been implemented. The research findings show that SAD is crucial for the benefit of both the monastics and the laity. It serves as a timeless guide for conflict resolution, develop leadership qualities and by respecting and revering the senior citizens, women, religious leaders like Arhats and the preservations of cultural and spiritual values lead for peace and harmony in society.

Keywords: *Satta Aparihāniya Dhamma, peace, harmony, psychology, society.*

Introduction

The *Satta Aparihāniya Dhamma* (SAD) is primarily aimed to promote social peace and harmony. It is an important instruction in evaluating the Buddhist approach to statecraft, monastics, families and society.¹ While critically analyzing on SAD provided by the Buddha

1 Barua, D. (2020). *The Seven Essential Dharmas: Principles of Unity and Good Governance*. Retrieved Jun 14, 2024 from <https://>

to the Vajjians, it focuses on people's physical, social, psychological, moral and cultural aspects.

SAD is an inclusive content of *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* of Dīgha Nikāya. The Blessed One explained forty-eight conditions of welfare for well-being of nation as well as monkstoo. It indicates that the Buddha's teachings are taught for both the monastics and the laity. Among them, the first seven conditions of welfare were possessed to the Vajjians which will be discussed in this paper.

Literally, *Satta Aparihāniya Dhamma* (SAD) means the 'Seven Conditions of Welfare'. Here, '*satta*' is a Pāli term means seven. '*Aparihāniya*' refers to non-decline, non-losing or non-decrease. As '*Aparihāniya*' is an antonym for word '*Parihāniya*'. Similarly, *Dhamma* comprises of several meanings. Thus, it is a polysemic word. According to Pāli-English dictionary, *Dhamma* signifies as norms, religion, morality, doctrine, the truth nature, truth and soon. However, the definition of *Dhamma* could be interpreted in many ways like;

Dhamma as Buddhist Teachings

Dhamma as Jewel

Dhamma as Moral Virtues (*Kusala Kamma*)

Dhamma as a Way to Eradicate Suffering

Dhamma as the Basis for Social and Political Philosophy

Dhamma as *Nibbāna*

To elucidate the story behind discoursing SAD to Vajjians, while the Blessed One was staying in the mountains called Vulture's Peak² in Rājagaha, the king of Magadha, Ajātasattu³ or Vedehiputta⁴ wanted to extend the territory thus attacked the Vajjians. Before the king proceed the action, he once believed that it would be challenging to engage in combat with well-organized and powerful groups. As the Blessed One lived nearby the palace, hence it would be effective to ask the Buddha for better suggestions.⁵ Therefore, the king then sent

www.buddhistdoor.net/features/the-seven-essential-dharmas-principles-of-unity-and-good-governance/

2 Vulture's Peak is even spelled as *Gijjakuta* in Pāli.

3 The literal meaning of Ajātasattu is 'unborn foe'. However, Rhys Davids shares the point that Ajātasattu was named later, according to act, thus it is not his personal name. Ajātasattu is called Konika or Kūnika by the Jains. (Malalasekera, G.P. (1961). *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, I. Sri Lanka: Government of Sri Lanka, p.315)

4 Vedehiputta means son of the lady from Videha. Ajātasattu's mother was a princess of Videha and daughter of King Kosala. Thus, Ajātasattu was even named as Vedehiputta. Sujāto (2023). *I'm confused by Ajātasattu's family*. Sutta Central. <https://discourse.suttacentral.net/t/im-confused-by-ajatasattu-s-family/27695>

5 Bajracharya, D.B. (2000). *The Digha Nikaya*. Gabahal: Bir-purna Pustak Sangrahalaya, p. 230.

his prime minister, Vassakāra Brahmin to the Buddha to request for appropriate suggestions to attack Vajjians. By drawing attention to Ven. Ānanda, the Blessed One spoke his view on this regard. Instead of giving direct answer, the Buddha delivered seven conditions conducive to the growth of nation. They are;

- Vajjians hold regular and frequent assemblies, it is reasonable to expect to prosper rather than decline.
- They conduct meetings harmoniously, disperse without conflict and manage their business affairs in unity.
- They do not sanction new decrees but adhere to their ancient traditions, neither revoking nor introducing laws without precedent.
- They show respect, honor and reverence towards their elders, valuing their wisdom and guidance.
- They refrain from abducting women or forcing them into marriage against their will.
- They continue to give the right kind of support that has been previously established, honoring, reverencing and saluting the shrines of the Vajjians both locally and abroad.
- Appropriate arrangements are taken to ensure the safety and comfort of *Arhats*, encouraging them to reside there and provide for those who already do.

After all, Vassakāra Brahmin went to the palace of King Ajātasattu, with the news of those behavioral qualities of Vajjians. On three years of passing by, when Vajjians didn't follow SAD, King Ajātasattu was able to get victory over Vajjians.⁶ Henceforth, from the event, it is ensured that SAD acts as an essential condition to assure the stability, prosperity and well-being of a society.

Next, the term 'harmony' denotes a feeling of compassion, serenity, liberty, fairness and derogatorily, it alludes a look of confrontation. The American Psychological Association (2018) defines harmony as a friendly or cooperative relations among people, such that social interactions are congruous and conflict free.⁷ Furthermore, Chen identified harmony as a human value, referring to compatibility and accord in feelings, actions, relationships, opinions, interests, etc.⁸ Also, denoting a state of balance among forces influencing and even

6 *Ibid*

7 American Psychological Association (APA). (2018). Retrieved Jun. 3, 2025 from <https://dictionary.apa.org/harmony>

8 Lopez, S.J. (2013). *The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology*. London: Wiley Blackwell, p. 464-467.

opposing one another. In Dhammapada⁹, the Buddha stressed the necessity of harmony for the *saṅgha*. He said: "*Samaggānam Tapo Sukha*"¹⁰ meaning "The harmony of *saṅgha* leads to happiness". So harmony is defined as a state of agreement and understanding among individuals, groups or nations that everyone should possess as it fosters peace and reduces conflicts. Harmony signifies human unity, concord and agreement that urges individual for moving forward to do concrete for the welfare of all beings.¹¹ Therefore, for an individual's mental well-being, peace and harmony must go parallel since it leads to unity among all.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze how the SAD fosters peace and harmony within community as the teachings of the Buddha are specifically focused on sharing empathy to the needy individuals. It could be understood as how the Buddha possessed a profound sense of empathy or rather compassion, among both Vajjians and King Ajātasattu.

Similarly, it is aforementioned that SAD is crucial for the people's social, physical, psychological, cultural and moral aspect. However, the paper is especially centered on demonstrating the psychological credentials of the Buddha highlighting on the teachings of SAD to promote peace and harmony. As a qualitative research design, both primary and secondary data are employed for the study. Using the original Pāli text translations of Nikāyas in English and Nepali, descriptive and analytical methods are applied. In addition, the secondary data from different sources are also used for the study.

Bhikkhu Bodhi (2016) in his book, '*The Buddha's Teachings on Social and Communal Harmony*' described the seven requirements must be met for societal peace. Instead of causing the community's decline, it brings about its prosperity. Of the two kinds of communities - harmonious and divided, harmonious community is the foremost, where the monks live in harmony, never arguing, blending together like milk and water, and look each other with affectionate eyes. Because of this, Bhikkhu Bodhi gave the Buddha's teachings practical importance in terms of sustaining community and building peace. Next, Peter Harvey (2000), an author of the book '*An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations*,

9 Dhammapada is a collection of 423 verses as uttered by the Buddha Himself to his disciples.

10 "*Sukhobuddhanamuppado
Sukha saddhamamadesanā
Sukha saṅghassa sāmaggi
Samaggānam tapo sukha*"

Meaning - Happy is the arising of a Buddha; happy is the exposition of the *Ariya Dhamma*, happy is the harmony amongst the *saṅgha*, and happy is the practice of those in harmony.

Acarya Buddhārakkhita. *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*. (1996). Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 69

11 Towards Peace and Harmony, p. 174. Retrieved Jun. 5, 2025 from <https://www.egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/63396/1/Unit-16.pdf>

Values and Issues has mentioned about political ideas where he talked about to create a peaceful and harmonious society, and free of poverty, the SAD of Vajjians must be followed. It is vital to follow being an ideal for a Buddhist ruler.

SAD and its Psychological Importance

The seven conditions of welfare basically emphasize societal harmony as a means of preventing decline. For a healthy environment within a country, it is not enough to be physically strong or economically independent, hygienic environment, political stability, and soon. In addition to these, citizens of the nation must be satisfied and should have serene mentality. Similarly, Vajjians were regarded as prosperous and content, and they upheld social harmony until they were following SAD. It is essential to practically implement these seven requirements in people's lives for the benefit of all. Furthermore, there are significant psychological components to these kinds of activities that promote mental stability and well-being. The harmonic society is linked to the psychological aspects of people living in those areas. These seven conditions of welfare are categorized into different topics and explain how those principles foster social peace and harmony.

Regular and Peaceful Meetings

The welfare of the society is based on the idea that frequent peaceful meetings keep the community cohesive and encourage openness and agreement when making decisions. In the book, "The Buddha's Teachings on Social and Communal Harmony: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon", Bhikkhu Bodhi highlights that a moral behavior based on right viewpoint (*sammā ditthi*). A shared commitment to moral behavior is the foundation of harmony in any community. To sustain the community for a long period, the environment must be a harmonious community where it would be presumptions to insist that a full acceptance of the right view is necessary for social harmony.

Vajjians hold meetings frequently fostering a sense of belonging and shared common goal. It benefited mental health and lessens feelings of loneliness. These regular gatherings also enhance the sharing of thoughts and viewpoints, or improve communications skills, aiding in the decision-making process. Aligning strategies with organizational goals and the well-being of team members lead to long-term positive effects on people and organizations. An organization's success stems from a participatory decision-making process, not the other way around. Therefore, emphasizing on harmony and consensus lessens conflict and improves group cohesion, and is more effective in building positive relationships.

Respect and Reverence Lead to Harmony

Respect is a key value that enables people to live peacefully within society. It serves as the foundation for social harmony, effective communication, and healthy relationships. Jack Roberts defines respect as an ability to appreciate others for who they are—regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion. It involves creating a secure and welcoming atmosphere where everyone's voice is valued, acknowledged, and responded to respectfully.

The SAD is based on principles that strongly support social justice. The first principle emphasizes the value of making decisions in a harmonious group setting where every member has an equal opportunity to share their opinions. Since each member of the group is equally important, thus their perspectives, beliefs, and ideas are discussed openly without bias or judgment. This kind of activity creates a sound environment, i.e. a peace and harmony within Vajjian's society.

Similarly, the fourth principle of SAD emphasizes the importance of valuing the wisdom and experience of elders. The elders, having accumulated a bundle of knowledge through life experience, offer insights that can guide younger generations in matters of governance, diplomacy, community well-being, and so on. For the Vajjians, following the advice on how to fight the war based on their prior experiences and they continue to practice regularly reflecting on their counsel. When Vajjians obeyed the advice of their senior members, especially in matters like warfare, is seen as a path to prosperity and stability.

Likewise, the fifth principle states that no citizen should harm a woman or maiden. However, if a citizen's wife is found to be engaged in adultery, she is required to inform the assembly and may, with its approval, take action against the guilty party, including the death penalty. The forced abduction and detention of women and girls is not only a grave injustice but also an act that undermines social stability. Such actions create deep resentment and unrest among the affected families and communities.

In a nutshell, respecting each other's ideas and perspectives, considering the senior citizens as they are an asset of knowledge and past experiences for the society, and admiring the every members of a society equally without discrimination in different matters like race, color, religion, language, gender, etc. lead to peace and harmony within Vajjian society.

Honor and Venerate the Cultural and Spiritual Values

An act of respecting, venerating, and preserving cultures and moral convictions contributes significantly to the strengthening of social harmony. Showing reverence to the

sacred places strengthens the spiritual foundation of the community, ensuring the sacred sites remain the center to spiritual activity and inspiration for generations to come.

The last two principles of SAD explain the Vajjians showed deep respect for the *dhamma* they were practicing. As long as Vajjians continue to support, respect, venerate and honor both the internal and external objects of worship and uphold traditional ceremonies, they continue to prosper rather than decline. The Buddha taught to a Brāhmin that "Paying homage to those who are worthy of veneration, whether they are the Buddhas or their disciples, who have overcome obstacles to Insight Development and have rid themselves of sorrow and lamentation."¹² In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*¹³, the Buddha explained to Ānanda that four individuals are worthy of building a stupa: the *Tathāgata*, the *Pacceka Buddha*, an *Arhat*, and a wheel-turning king (*Cakkavati rājā*). Honoring these stupas bring serenity to their hearts, of those who venerate them. Next, in the *Mahāmaṅgala Sutta*¹⁴ the Buddha explained that the highest blessing is to honor or venerate *samanas*¹⁵. He elevated on the merits of honoring the stupas or shrines dedicated to him and other holy personnel like *Arahats* in several *suttas*.

As long as people honor the stupas, shrines and venerate the religious profiles, it arises empathy. Practicing empathy allows individuals to recognize and connect with the needs of others, considering all as oneness. When people assume difficulties of others as their own, it stresses and reinforces traits like kindness, forgiveness, compassion, and love. These personality characteristics promote social peace and harmony when they are shared within a community among compassionate and appreciating people.

Also, it is an act of accumulating merits (*puñña*). During the course of veneration, their mind will be in tranquility leading to the calmness of one's body, mind and speech. Such activity surely help to attain peace and harmony within self and society too.

Conflict Resolution

Conflicts and violence are the outcome of emotional imbalances within ourselves.¹⁶ To prevent this, we must effectively maintain our mental equilibrium.

12 *Pūjārahepūjayato, buddhe yedivasāvake, Papañcasamatikkante, tinnasokapariddave.* (Dhammapada verse 195)

13 D. ii. p. 141.

14 SN II, p. 198. *Samañānañcadassanam, etaṃmaṅgalam muttamam.*

15 *Samanas* are the disciples of Buddha, they may be the *Arhants* or those practicing the path to liberation.

16 Santiago, N. (2004). Role of Emotional Intelligence in Conflict Resolution and Prevention in Columbia. *Journal of Conflict Management*, 4(1), 14-25. <https://doi.org/10.47604/jcm.2381>

Harmony in decision-making is essential for promoting collaboration and unity within teams and organizations. The Vajjians exemplify this by involving each and every Vajjian member in brainstorming sessions with their leaders, encouraging collective examination and consultation. The best ways to lessen conflict amongst people are to manage their business operations in unison, hold meetings often, conduct meetings peacefully, and disperse to each other without conflict. The influential activities during the meetings conducted, the Vajjians must meet again when necessary, even if they have already assembled three or four times a day. They believed that the rulers should convene according to the timetable, but they should also be prepared to meet regardless of the timetable based on the past events. Meetings should not be postponed; and must be scheduled as needed.

Vajjians believed conflicts can occur when meetings are held in two different settings. They strictly followed the rules. Those who leave the room early might believe they only participated in the external discussions (*Bāhirakathā*), while internal meetings (*Abhyantarakathā*) continued without them. To avoid confusion and disagreements, everyone present should leave the meeting room together once the assembly is officially over. Furthermore, Vajjians oppose the entry of negative ideas and support the maintenance of positive customs and laws. It denotes their regard for the traditions and principles that underpin their prosperity. When new concepts are incorporated into ancient laws without the endorsement and permission of community members, it impedes the law's provision within the community. As a result, Vajjians regard such activities as critical components of conflict resolution. Similarly, it is equally important to preserve *Arhats* within the community. *Arhats* are those who have already attained enlightenment after the Fully Enlightened One, described as *Buddhānubuddha*.¹⁷ By observing their teachings, we are encouraged to follow their example. For this reason, the Vajjians regard *Arhats* as their sacred individuals, as they help in distinguishing between *akusala* and *kusala* acts. Moreover, the presence of *Arhats* inspire positive thinking, which plays a crucial role in resolving conflicts and fostering social harmony.

Leadership Development

SAD fosters social coherence, stability, resilience and harmony among groups. It is essential to ensure the success of an organization by guiding toward effective leadership qualities. Those traditional even conditions of welfare have direct relevance for leadership. Leaders are encouraged to foster transparency and trust through regular meetings and act in harmony with the values of the group to strengthen miracle. We can see Vajji's strong qualities clearly reflected in the SAD. In an unpublished Master's thesis from Lumbini

¹⁷ Malalasekera, G.P. (1966). *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, II, Sri Lanka: Government of Sri Lanka, p. 42.

Buddhist University, Manandhar (2023) asserts that "the leader who follows these seven principles of welfare in the home, organization or nations sustains and prospers, not decline."¹⁸

The leader plays a crucial role in creating harmony and peace within society. A skilled leader cultivates harmony, tranquility and prosperity. In the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*,¹⁹ the ten essential qualities known as *Dasa Rāja Dhamma* are outlined as guiding principles that a state holder (or administration) should have. These qualities are *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (virtue), *paricāga* (sacrifice), *ajjava* (working honestly), *maddava* (softness), *tapa* (austerity), *akkodha* (following to reason, not anger), *avihimsā* (non-violence), *khanti* (patience), and *avirodhana* (non-conflict). The Vajjians encouraged everyone to maintain peace, hold discussions in harmony and conduct business affairs collaboratively to ensure smooth governance. A key aspect of effective leadership is the members' unwavering unity and selflessly willingness to cooperate. The peace and harmony is shaped by its leader. Therefore, the seven conditions of welfare are even essential to develop an effective leadership qualities.

Conclusion

The *Satta Aparihāniya Dhamma* (SAD) is crucial to foster peace and harmony in the society. The development of a country depends on the effective government system, justice provided to the citizens, leadership qualities of the leader and the laws enforced within a country. Among the teachings of the Buddha on maintaining peace and harmony, SAD is weighed as one of the most important teachings as it covers the social, cultural, psychological, economic and moral aspects of the country. The different seven points as conducting meetings frequently to discuss on ongoing process, following the laws followed within a country, respecting the senior citizens and practicing equity among all help to develop peace and harmony in the society. Similarly, respecting and venerating the stupas and the revered individuals like *Arahats*, their teachings or wisdom lead to the social and communal peace and harmony. Last but not the least, the status of a society is shaped by a good leader creating an atmosphere for unity, peace and prosperity.

18 Manandhar, U. (2023). *Buddha's Teachings for Leadership Development*, Kathmandu: Lumbini Buddhist University, pp. 30-31.

19 D. iii. 58-79.

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