



## Empowering Social Cohesion in Society: Insights from Buddhist Philosophy and Practice

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### Abstract

This study explores how core Buddhist teachings can effectively strengthen social cohesion in contemporary societies marked by polarization, inequality, and rapid transformation. Drawing from key doctrinal principles such as interdependence (paṭicca-samuppāda), non-violence (ahiṃsā), mental cultivation (bhāvanā), and the ethical foundations of the Five Precepts, the paper highlights Buddhism's capacity to nurture harmonious social relationships. Textual sources—including the Saṅgha-vatthus, Brahmavihāras, Siṅgālovāda Sutta, Upāli Sutta, Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Sutta, Kūṭadanta Sutta, and Aggañña Sutta demonstrate how Buddhist thought promotes equality, mutual responsibility, just governance, and moral accountability. By addressing the roots of social conflict through the framework of the Three Poisons (greed, hatred, and delusion), Buddhism offers practical strategies to cultivate compassion, empathy, and collective well-being. The study adopts a qualitative methodology based on secondary sources to examine how these teachings can be applied meaningfully within modern political, economic, and cultural contexts. The findings suggest that integrating Buddhist ethical principles into social structures and community practices can play a transformative role in reducing division, enhancing trust, and fostering sustainable social harmony.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Social Cohesion, Interdependence, Saṅgha-vatthus, Brahmavihāras

### Introduction

Within the current context of fast-paced readjustments in the global political landscape, the rise of virtual echo chambers, and the growth of societal inequality, the communities of the world are facing a level of fragmentation and polarization that has heretofore been unprecedented in human experience. Social cohesion refers to the level of interconnectivity and cohesion that prevails in society through shared values, trust, and a sense of belonging to that society, based on the preparedness to work together, to dialogue in a non-violent manner, and to share a similar purpose and goal. Buddhist ethics and core philosophical principles, particularly interdependence (paṭicca-samuppāda), non-violence (ahiṃsā), and mental cultivation (bhāvanā) provide a robust and practical foundation for fostering sustainable and genuine social cohesion. These principles encourage individuals and communities to recognize their mutual dependence, to refrain from harm, and to develop self-awareness and compassion. By promoting empathy, ethical conduct, and mindful engagement, Buddhist thought offers not only a moral framework but also practical tools for reducing tension, healing social divisions, and strengthening communal bonds in diverse and conflict-prone societies. This study will examine key Buddhist teachings that directly contribute to fostering social harmony and cohesion, including the Saṅgha-vatthus (the four bases of social solidarity), the Brahmavihāras (the four divine abodes of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity), the doctrine of Karma and moral accountability, and the Five Precepts as a foundational ethical code. Together, these teachings offer

a comprehensive framework for promoting ethical behavior, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and cultivating an environment conducive to peaceful coexistence.

### Methodology

This study fully complied with qualitative research design. Secondary sources directly guide this paper to get critical idea of Buddhist perspective for empowering social cohesion in society.

### Aim

The main aim of this paper is discussed how Buddhist teaching could be empower social cohesion in present society.

### Introduction to social cohesion

Cohesion is divided into two types: task cohesion and social cohesion. Social cohesion is a dynamic process reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and or for the satisfaction of member affective needs (Carron *et al.*, 1998) Members of a cohesive society have a strong willingness to act in solidarity. They share common goals and interests, and they remain closely connected through constant interaction and effective interpersonal communication. Such societies are marked by a high level of group loyalty, where individual needs are met through collective support. Social cohesion is therefore reflected in three key aspects: connectedness, strong social relationships, and a shared commitment to the common good.

### Core element of Social Cohesion

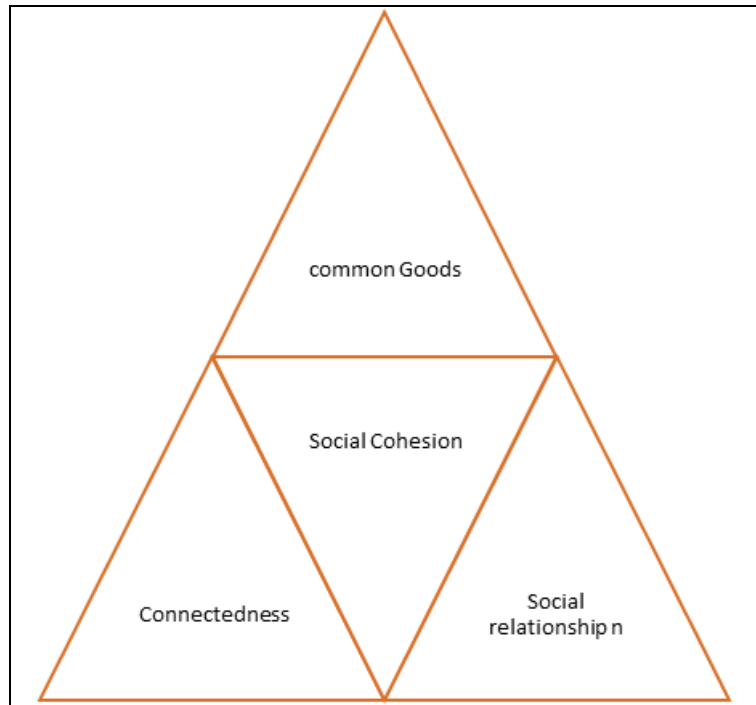


Fig 1

Social cohesion can be strengthened in political, social, economic and cultural aspects. According to research findings of Emile Durkheim (1858), Talcott Parson (1902), Putnam (1993), Woolly (1998), Lockwood (1999), Alaluf (1999) Kearns (2000), Forrest (2000), Begger (2000) Schmitt (2000) Amin (2000) and Jomaney (2000).

A society where social cohesion is strong is marked by several defining characteristics. Social solidarity is high, collective welfare is valued, and egalitarian aspirations guide social interactions. People share common loyalties, participate in a continuous and fair distribution of tasks, and engage willingly in community associations. Such communities cultivate a sense of shared belonging and equality, while actively working to reduce disparities and minimize social exclusion.

In cohesive societies, citizens recognize their responsibilities to each other and to the state. They uphold shared values and norms, identify with common goals, and operate within a collective moral framework and code of conduct. They are also aware of the challenges posed by rapid social change and respond by prioritizing consensus, adaptation, and balanced attitudes rather than conflict and division. Primary and secondary social networks are strengthened, fostering strong relationships, interactions, and social ties. This, in turn, enhances the overall social capital of the community.

Moreover, these societies are generally free from civic corruption, social fragmentation, widespread crime, and family breakdown. Social cohesion, therefore, becomes a protective and stabilizing force that sustains harmony and collective well-being.

**Literature Review**

In many ways, Buddhism was a social protest movement against the Hindu caste system with its superstitious obedience to the Brahma and its sacrifices of humans and animals. In his sermons about the right way to live, the Buddha refuted the caste system; claiming that all people were equal and that government should be democratic and

just. The Buddha preached that there are no superhuman Gods or kings, that man is his own master and that no higher deity sits in judgment over his destiny. He spoke out against human and animal sacrifices, superstition, and beliefs in magical ceremonies. ...Buddhism, the emphasis is upon individual selfreliance: observing, knowing, understanding and doing” Carrison (1987). Buddhism is a religion of peace and non-violence (Yeh, 2006). The Buddhist analysis of the causes of violence and conflict is arrayed along three domains: the internal, the external, and the root (Shih Yin-shun, 1980).

The Buddhist teachings which promote mutual respect, mutual understanding, social harmony, and social cohesion has positively influenced in many ways for implementing a human friendly society.

**Buddhism and Social Cohesion**

The fundamental goal of Buddhism is peace. When individuals cultivate peaceful minds, social cohesion naturally emerges, because inner peace leads to peaceful speech and harmonious actions. Understanding the causes and conditions that create peace is therefore essential for fostering social cohesion.

Buddhist teachings related to social, political, and economic life demonstrate how the Buddha’s wisdom has supported and strengthened social harmony for more than 2,500 years. These teachings continue to guide societies toward cooperation, compassion, and collective well-being.

In Sutta Pitaka, VasettaSutta explained there is no any other division among human beings except gender differences: male and female. The Buddha rendered his services without considering the gender, ethnicity, and other socio-cultural factors such as caste. People who belonged to all castes: Brahmin, Kshastriya, Vaishya, and Kshudra could be seen among disciples of the Buddha. Rev Kassapawas a Brahmin. While Rev Ananda belonged to the Kshastriya casteSuneetha and Sopaka belonged to the Shudra caste.

Both male and female were allowed to robe and these males and females represented BhikkuSasanaand BhukkuniSasana.

Not only that, they were given leadership positions according to their capabilities without considering caste and gender differences as explains in EttadaggaPali in AnguttaraNikaya. Moreover, everyone was treated equally. e.g. Rahula who was his son in lay life and Sopaka who belonged to Kshudra were treated alike.

The Upāli Sutta (MN 56) in the Majjhima Nikāya is one of the most important discourses demonstrating the Buddha's remarkable openness, tolerance, and non-sectarian attitude toward other religious traditions and their leaders. The sutta revolves around Upāli, a wealthy and respected householder who was originally a devoted follower of Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta (also known as Mahāvīra), the leader of the Jain community. Upali visits the Buddha initially with the intention of challenging him in debate, as encouraged by the Jain monks. However, after a profound conversation with the Buddha particularly regarding the nature of karma and intention Upali becomes convinced of the Buddha's teachings. Deeply moved by the Buddha's wisdom and compassion, Upali expresses his desire to become a follower of the Buddha and take refuge in the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. Instead of immediately welcoming Upāli as a new disciple, the Buddha displays great clarity, compassion, and ethical sensitivity. He instructs Upāli to consider carefully the implications of changing his religious allegiance, because he was a prominent supporter of the Jain community. Sudden conversion could create disharmony or misunderstanding. This already demonstrates the Buddha's refusal to convert followers simply for numerical gain highlighting his emphasis on sincerity and understanding rather than recruitment.

The Siṅgālovāda Sutta (DN 31) provides one of the most comprehensive ethical frameworks for promoting social cohesion within a community. In this discourse, the Buddha outlines duties, responsibilities, and expected behaviors among different social relationships—parents and children, teachers and students, spouses, friends, employers and employees, and religious practitioners and laypeople. By emphasizing social solidarity, respectful interactions, and the fulfillment of mutual duties, the sutta offers practical guidelines for avoiding social exclusion and strengthening harmonious coexistence.

In societies where family disorganization and weakening of social bonds are common features, the teachings of the Siṅgālovāda Sutta can act as a stable ethical system. When individuals uphold these values, they help reinforce both the primary network (family, relatives, close social circles) and secondary network (institutions, workplaces, community groups), ultimately creating a more cohesive society.

The Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Sutta (DN II 56), Kūṭadanta Sutta (DN II 127), and Aggañña Sutta (DN II 80) further extend this discussion to the political sphere. These discourses illustrate how rulers can govern political empowerment, fairness, and moral responsibility, especially in societies composed of diverse communities. The ruling models

suggested in these suttas promote democratic values, social equality, and the strengthening of collective welfare.

Additionally, these three suttas highlight the importance of political and economic cohesion. They teach that a righteous ruler treats all civilians equally, regardless of caste, class, or background. Governance based on justice and compassion leads to a society where traditional crimes and social conflicts gradually disappear. This is because the ruler understands the root causes of crime, such as poverty, inequality, and unmet basic needs—and addresses them through social and economic reforms rather than punishment alone.

In such societies, people develop a sense of mutual obligation: citizens feel responsible toward the state, and the state acts responsibly toward its people. This reciprocal relationship fosters egalitarian aspirations, where fairness, shared responsibility, and collective well-being become the foundation of social life.

### The Principle of Interdependence (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*)

The Buddhist philosophical bedrock for social cohesion is deeply rooted in the concept of Interdependence, known in Pāli as *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is the principle that all phenomena are empty of a permanent, independent self (self-nature) and exist only in dependence on multiple causes and conditions. It can be summarized by the formula:

"When this is, that is. From the arising of this, that arises. When this is not, that is not. From the cessation of this, that ceases."

This principle explains the genesis and cessation of suffering (and existence) through a specific chain of twelve causal links (the Twelve Nidānas), but its application extends far beyond the psychological realm to encompass all of reality, including social structures.

The recognition of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* fundamentally dismantles the illusion of social separation and leads directly to an ethical mandate for collective well-being. The core implication for social cohesion is the profound realization that one's own happiness, safety, and security are inextricably linked to the well-being and harmony of all others. The understanding that "when others suffer, I suffer; when others flourish, I flourish" transforms altruism from a mere moral ideal into a rational necessity based on the laws of cause and effect. This forms the ethical foundation for compassionate action (*karuṇā*) and sympathetic joy (*muditā*) as prerequisites for a successful, happy life.

### The Roots of Social Disruption: The Three Poisons

In Buddhism, the core causes of conflict and disunity, both on an individual and a social level, are rooted in the Three Poisons or Three Unwholesome Roots (*Akusala-mūla* in Pāli; *Triviṣa* or *Kleśas* in Sanskrit). These are the fundamental mental defilements that drive unwholesome actions and perpetuate suffering (*dukkha*)

Table 1

Pāli Term	English Translation	Core Nature (Mental State)
Lobha	Greed (Attachment, Craving, Lust)	Compulsive desire for what one likes or wants to acquire/possess.
Dosa	Hatred (Aversion, Ill-Will, Anger)	The impulse to reject, push away, or destroy what one dislikes or fears.
Moha	Delusion (Ignorance, Confusion)	The fundamental misunderstanding of reality (e.g., believing in a permanent self or permanent phenomena).

Greed operates not only within individuals but also through social systems. When greed becomes normalized, societies start valuing profit over people. This leads to widening economic inequality, as wealth and resources become concentrated in the hands of a few. Businesses may exploit workers by offering low wages, unsafe working conditions, or unfair contracts, all to maximize profits. Communities may face environmental degradation because industries prioritize economic gain over sustainable practices. In this environment, people often compete aggressively, weakening social bonds and increasing mistrust. Over time, greed-driven structures create cycles of poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion, affecting the stability and wellbeing of entire societies.

Hatred becomes socially visible when prejudices against ethnicity, religion, gender, caste, or political identity gain collective acceptance. When groups label others as inferior or threatening, it fuels discrimination in laws, institutions, and everyday behavior. Hatred can escalate into violence, such as riots, hate crimes, and communal conflicts. Social media can amplify these emotions by spreading hostile narratives quickly. Over time, hatred erodes social trust, divides communities, and creates environments where people live in fear. A society shaped by hatred often normalizes aggression, making compassion and empathy rare.

Delusion manifests socially as distorted understanding, misinformation, and rigid worldviews. When people cling to incorrect beliefs or refuse to question their assumptions, societies become polarized. Groups may form echo chambers where only their own views are reinforced, making dialogue difficult. Delusion also leads to dogmatism, where individuals believe their ideology, religion, or political stance is the only truth. This rigidity prevents compromise, undermines democratic processes, and fuels social conflict. As delusion spreads—often through unchecked media or propaganda people struggle to distinguish truth from falsehood, weakening social cohesion and collective decision-making.

### Direct Teachings on Social Harmony

This section highlights texts and concepts that are specifically designed to foster community cohesion and social unity. These teachings emphasize the importance of mutual respect, shared responsibilities, and ethical behavior as the foundation for harmonious living. Rather than focusing solely on individual spiritual progress, they prioritize the well-being of the collective, showing how personal actions influence the larger social fabric.

### The Four Bases of Social Unity (*Saṅgha-vatthus*)

These are four practical principles explicitly taught by the Buddha to foster unity and prevent discord, found in texts like the *Sigālaka Sutta*:

- **Dāna (Generosity/Giving):** Sharing resources and knowledge to reduce economic disparity and cultivate good will.
- **Peyyavajja (Sympathetic Communication):** Speaking kindly, truthfully, and beneficially; avoiding harsh or divisive speech.
- **Atthacariyā (Acts that Produce Benefit):** Engaging in constructive actions for the common good and welfare of the community.

- **Samānattatā (Social Equality/Impartiality):** Treating all people fairly and equally, regardless of social status, caste, or background.

### The Four Sublime Attitudes (*Brahmavihāras*)

These are the psychological tools for transforming personal emotions into universal social virtues:

- **Mettā (Loving-Kindness):** The wish for the happiness of all beings. This is the antidote to hatred.
- **Karuṇā (Compassion):** The wish to relieve the suffering of all beings. This motivates social service.
- **Mudītā (Sympathetic Joy):** Rejoicing in the success and happiness of others. This is the antidote to envy and social rivalry.
- **Upekkhā (Equanimity):** Maintaining an impartial and balanced mind, allowing one to serve without attachment or discrimination.

### Conclusion

Buddhist principles offer a comprehensive framework for fostering social cohesion, bridging both philosophical insights and practical guidance. From the understanding of interdependence and the three poisons to the ethical structures of the *Saṅgha-vatthus*, these teachings illuminate how individual behavior and collective systems are deeply intertwined. The Buddha's emphasis on mindfulness, wisdom (*paññā*), and ethical conduct provides tools to reduce greed, hatred, and delusion, thereby promoting harmony at both personal and societal levels. Likewise, his model of the *Saṅgha* demonstrates the potential of inclusive communities that transcend divisions of caste, wealth, and origin. The cultivation of a cohesive society requires a dual effort: first, inner transformation, where individuals practice ethical living and mental discipline to become agents of peace; second, social engagement, where compassion, equity, and mindful action are applied to everyday interactions and institutional structures. Only through this combination can lasting harmony and unity be achieved. To realize the contemporary relevance of these ancient principles, there is an ongoing need to integrate them into education, governance, and community initiatives. By encouraging dialogue, fostering understanding, and implementing practices that nurture empathy and fairness, societies can address modern challenges of diversity, conflict, and inequality moving closer to the vision of a truly cohesive and harmonious world.

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