

# Environmental Pollution and Buddhist Philosophy

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*The paper intends to survey the teachings of Buddha on the protection of environment that will inspire the people in protection of it which will help to make world a pleasant place to live in. Buddha had given several teachings on the need of environment protection. Buddha not only inspired people to preserve environment, he himself had shown the activities for preserving it. Buddha emphasized not only to abate physical pollution which is cause due to destruction of physical environment, he emphasized also to protect social psychological and moral environment. I have to throw light the ancient Buddhist teachings, which are as valid today as they have always been, in widening circles Buddhism can be an active element in proper conservation of the natural environment.*

Environment is the aggregate of surrounding things. The surrounding things may be air, water, minerals, organism etc. It includes social and cultural forces that shape a life of person or entire population.<sup>1</sup> Good environment is essential for a balanced life. Today's world is facing serious problems of environmental destruction. Most of the forests, trees and plants are destroyed causing disappearance of several types of rare. Smoke and dust from the chimney of Industry is making air pollution. Rivers and seas are getting polluted from the human and industrial waste. Increment of carbon dioxide is depleting ozone layer, creating acid rains in several places, soil is losing nitrogen, global warming is increasing etc. Environmental protection generally relates to the protection of physical surroundings i.e. forest, trees, plants, wetlands, animals etc. Lack of environmental protection due to different types of pollution threatens the life of the people. Thus, protection of environment is becoming the important agenda for government and people. But overall environmental protection also needs to include the social, psychological and the moral values. A modern Buddhist scholar, for instance, has

pointed out that Modernity is rejected because it is seen as a form of life that has in a short period of time despoiled the landscape and done irreparable damage to the environment.<sup>2</sup>

In traditional Buddhist texts there seems to be very little direct references of environmental ideas. The strong connection that people felt with nature is illustrated particularly in the story of the Buddha's life. Buddha was born under the tree at Lumbini garden. Mahamaya Devi gave birth to Siddhartha only after holding a branch of tree. Siddhartha attained enlightenment under a tree which became popular in the name of Bodhitree (tree of enlightenment). After getting enlightenment he became so grateful to the Bodhi tree that he with profound gratitude gazed Bodhi tree with motion less eyes for one whole week.<sup>3</sup> Similarly he delivered first sermon to five hermits under the tree and took last respiration between two Sal trees of kushinara. It shows there is near *relation between Buddha and trees* in Buddha's life.

Buddha a great teacher can be said as the pioneer in protection of the physical as well as mental environment. The Buddha taught that respect for life and the natural world is essential. By living simply one can be in harmony with other creatures and learn to appreciate the interconnectedness of all lives. The simplicity of life involves developing openness to our environment and relating to the world with awareness and responsive perception. It also enables us to enjoy without possessing, and mutually benefit each other without manipulation.<sup>4</sup> Buddha has given importance of proper environment to get success in physical as well as spiritual development. According to him the overall development of a people start from the environment he is living in. In Mangala (Auspice) sutta, Buddha had said that "*patirupa desh vaso ca etam mangala muttamam*" or 'It is auspice to live at the proper place'.<sup>5</sup> 'Proper place' means the place with good environment. Buddhism teaches that if we wish to save the environment, we must first analyze our lives to determine how our self-deification is destroying the world by depleting, overpopulating, and polluting the environment.

Physical environment is concerned to the Physical surroundings. It includes trees, water, air etc. Buddha had realized the important of tree for people. Nature always knows where and when to stop. There is measure in all natural things- in their size, speed, or violence. As a result, the system of nature, of which man is a part, tends to be self-balancing, self-adjusting, self-

cleansing. Not so with technology... (Which) recognizes no self-limiting principle- in terms, for instance, of size, speed, or violence? It therefore does not possess the virtues of being self-balancing, self-adjusting, and self-cleansing.<sup>6</sup> There are several teachings of the protection of trees in the Buddhist literature as in Vinaya pitaka, Jataka, Dhammapada etc. There are several rules in Vinaya pitaka which prohibit monks to make pollutions. In the Bhutagamavagga pacittiakanda<sup>7</sup>, Monks are prohibited to cut the trees. *Monks and nuns are not allowed to excrete stool and urine in the green grass and into the water.* Bhikkhunis are prohibited to throw discretion and dust in from the window and also should not throw those things in the field full with crops.<sup>8</sup> Sariputta the chief disciple of Buddha used to go out for alms round only after cleaning toilets and sweeping rooms. In Dhammapada monks are instructed to live in the village without disturbing the people and with out making pollution. In this regard Buddha had said: “Yatha pi bhamaro puppham vannagandham ahethayam Paliti rasam adaya evam game muni care” or ‘As a bee without harming the flower, its color or scent, flies away, collecting only the honey, even so should the sage wander in the village’.<sup>9</sup> The miracle of the "double appearances"<sup>10</sup> shows Buddha's love to nature. The great concerned of Buddha in the protection of tree is also depicted in this verse of Dhammapada where Buddha had said: “*Vanam chindatha ma rukkham*” or ‘Cut down the unnecessary brush (of the passion) but not a single tree’.<sup>11</sup> It has a great significant meaning in the sense that we should protect trees from unnecessary and unwanted bushes and grass which may hamper actual growth of the trees. Certain trees are taken as deities in Jataka.<sup>12</sup> In Jataka there are several stories of Bodhisattva born as a Brikshye devata (tree sprite) which is actually a tree. According to Buddha one can be a tree sprite only when he accumulates pious by performing wholesome deed in the human life. There are more than a couple dozen births taken by Bodhisattva as a tree sprite. The instance of Ankura petavatthu of khuddaka nikaya also clears the Buddhist literature is much more devoted for protection of trees.<sup>13</sup>

There are also several discourses for preservation of animals and bird in Buddha's teachings. *Animals and Birds are given equal important in the Buddhist literature.* Buddha had taken several births as animals and birds and had performed several welfare activities for their community. There are several Jatakas in which Bodhisattva as a leader got success in getting

abhayadana (right to live without fear) from king for animal community. "Ahimsa" is the first of the five precepts of Buddhist life and a major principle of Jainism. In practice, Buddhists believe that it is the act of killing or hurting an animal which is harmful, but not the eating of meat that someone else has provided. Five precepts which are basic teachings of Buddha prohibit killing and slaughtering the animals. The Right livelihood of eight fold noble path prohibits to do trade of animals, meat etc. Monks also are not allowed to use the things made by bone, teeth and horn of an animals according to Ratana vagga pacittiya kanda.<sup>14</sup> In this way Buddha had given great contribution for preservation of animals which is the part of environmental protection.

The main goal of Buddha's teachings is to get free from defilement and bondage by attaining enlightenment. Buddha had shown the clear path to attain enlightenment or Nibbana. It is making effort to practice of *Sila* (morality), *Samadhi* (concentration), and *Panna*(wisdom). Specifically the only one path that makes the people free from the bondage is practice of Satipatthana,<sup>15</sup> or Vipassana which is called Buddhist meditation. Buddha had said good environment is needed for the proper practice of meditation. The Buddha, Arahats and other Bhikkhus regard the tranquil, calm and quiet environment of the forests as an ideal site for meditation. Buddha in Satipatthana sutta had traced the proper place may be at the forest (*arranna gato*), under the tree (*rukhamula*), calm and quiet place (sunnyagara) etc. Buddha also had attained enlightenment in the forest of Gaya under Bodhi tree. In this way the forest, trees are the place where one can practice for the liberation. So Buddha had given more important to protect those places.

*Cleanliness was highly commended by the Buddhists both in the person and in the environment.* They were much concerned about keeping water clean, be it in the river, pond, or well. These sources of water were for public use and each individual had to use them with proper public-spirited caution so that others after him could use them with the same degree of cleanliness. Rules regarding the cleanliness of green grass were prompted by ethical and aesthetic considerations.

Noise is today recognized as a serious personal and environmental pollutant troubling everyone to some extent. It causes deafness, stress, and irritation, breeds resentment, saps

energy, and inevitably lowers efficiency.<sup>16</sup> The Buddha's attitude to noise is very clear from the Pali canon. He was critical of noise and did not hesitate to voice his stern disapproval whenever occasion arose.<sup>17</sup> *Noise is described as a thorn to one engaged in the first step of meditation,*<sup>18</sup> but thereafter noise ceases to be a disturbance as the meditator passes beyond the possibility of being disturbed by sound. The sage who succeeded in quelling this inner speech completely is described as a muni<sup>19</sup>, a silent one.<sup>20</sup> Buddhism commends speaking at the appropriate time, speaking the truth, speaking gently, speaking what is useful, and speaking out of loving-kindness; the opposite modes of speech are condemned.<sup>21</sup>

Karmic effects sometimes catch up with people via their environment. It is thus said that, if a king and his people act unrighteously, this has a bad effect on the environment and its gods, leading to little... rain, poor crops and weak, short-lived people.<sup>22</sup> In the beginning, nature was beautiful, but it became less so when humans began to take greedily from it.<sup>23</sup> When they began to harvest more rice than they needed, it was not naturally able to grow quickly enough. This necessitated cultivation which in turn caused division of land into private fields, so that property was invented. Origin of private property became the root cause of different social and economic ills. Generally accumulated karma is the decisive force in shaping the life style of a person. But good environment also plays vital role in making good or bad life. The instance can be given of Angulimala or Ahinsaka who despite of having the quality to attain arhathood, became a murderer of 999 people due to the bad environment and company with bad friends in the school.<sup>24</sup> Similarly the instance of a son of multimillionaire of Varanasi,<sup>25</sup> who according to Buddha had capable to achieve arhathood or setthi of that country if he could make effort at proper time, but due to the lack of good environment and good company became a beggar in the street. In this way *good and proper environment plays vital role in getting success in life.* Buddhist precepts direct the faithful to seek a right livelihood, an essential dimension of which is concern for the life of all creatures.<sup>26</sup>

The external environment is seriously polluted because the internal environment in the mind is seriously damaged. *Mental pollution is also a significant factor that effects the environment.* It is intangible things but has great effect in making good and bad environment. The bottomless greed has pushed mankind to satisfy excessive and unnecessary demands, and

take them into endless competitions, leading to self-destruction and environmental damage. Buddha's teachings emphasize to make good mentality in order to get peace of mind. The first verse of Dhammapada states mind as the forerunner of states. All the activities are based on the mind so if mind get polluted several problem would arise and if mind is free from pollution environment becomes so pure that every one will be able to enjoy calm and peace.<sup>27</sup> Buddha's had spent whole life in teaching how to develop good mind. According to him the cause of suffering is the polluted mind and to get free from it one should be free from the polluted mind. Cakka vatti sihanada sutta<sup>28</sup> of Digha Nikaya points out a close link between man's morals and the natural resources. It is said that man's moral deterioration accelerates the process of change in nature bringing adverse effects on human well being and happiness.

'*Cittena Niyati Lok*' is a Buddhist theme, which means the world is governed by mind. Human mind dominated by greed, hatred and delusion produces pollution within and outside. Generosity, compassion, loving-kindness (*Metta*), altruistic joy and wisdom produce purity inside and outside of human mind. In abhidhamma Buddha had classified the mind the mental factors. Mind gets polluted due to the bad mental factors which are called ashovana chetasika. The ashovana or akusala cetasika makes the mind impure creating impure environment pollution. There are the 14 unwholesome cetasika that creates mental pollution: *Moha*–Ignorance; *Ahirika*–Lack of moral shame; *Anotappa*–Lack of dread; *Uddhacca*–Restlessness; *Lova*–greed; *Dristi*–Wrong view. *Maan* Infatuation; *Dvesh*–Anger; *Irshya*–Jealous; *Maccharia*–Stinginess, *Avarice*; *KukuChha*–Uneasiness of conscience; *Thin*–Torpor; *Middha*–Sloth; *Vicikichha*–Sceptical doubt.<sup>29</sup> Those above mental factors are emerged in the mind of people making the whole environment with polluted mental vibration. Peoples full of those types of mentality destroy the peace and prosperity of the society. Such type of people every time creates the tense and conflict situation which eventually makes quarreling, vandalizing. The whole teachings of Buddha are concentrated to get rid from that unwholesome mentality and to produce positive vibration in the environment.

According to Buddha mental vibration has powerful effect in making the environment delightful. Only making good environment physically is not sufficient, people inhabitants should also possess good mentality in order to make the place delightful. One can't live happily

and peacefully at that place if the majority of people there are full of anger, hatred and illusions. But people even with full of tension can feel happy and peace if the place is full with loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. In this way a person with good mentality can contribute for the good environment in the society.

Buddha had said that good or bad environment is also the product of the vibration produced by people living at the place. *Good vibration is produced by the people who are free from defilements*; the place would be cheerful and peaceful where the saintly person with out defilement lives. It is because each and every person produces mental vibration in the atmosphere creating good or bad environment. Buddha in Dhammapada had uttered the verse in this respect as: “*Game va yadi va ranne ninne va yadi va thale Yattharahanto viharanti tam bhumim Ramaneyyakam*” or ‘Whether in village or in forest, in vale or on hill, wherever Arahants dwell, delightful indeed, is that spot’.<sup>30</sup>

In this way good environment is the aggregate of both physical as well as mental environment. Only protection of physical environment is insufficient and not a complete protection of environment. In Buddha's teachings there are several discourses of protection of not only of physical environment. It also has focused on the need of protecting mental environment. Buddha's teachings if is securitized properly it reveals the protection the society from the pollution that could be from the Kaya (body), Vacana (speech), and Mana (mind). If the teachings of Buddha are propagated properly the problem of environmental destruction can be minimized significantly. "Pollution cannot be dealt with in the long term on a remedial or cosmetic basis or by tackling symptoms: all measures should deal with basic causes. These are determined largely by our values, priorities and choices."<sup>31</sup> "If the intention is to play a useful role in society in order to support oneself and to help others, then the work one does is right livelihood".<sup>32</sup>

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