

The Significance of Environment Conservation

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Overview

Environment is the surrounding in which a person, animal or plant lives and protecting the environment will be beneficial to the entire beings of the universe. The researcher intends to investigate about the Buddhist perspective to protect the environment as the entire world faces burning ecological problems at present. Environmental protection is becoming one of the critical problems facing mankind today as people pollute the environment risking the lives of the entire beings. The threat of the environmental pollution is so severe that it affects the ecology immensely. Since Buddhism is an ecological religion, many have viewed that reality is profoundly ecological. It reveals that there is a close relationship of human identification with nature. Buddhists believe that entire things in the world including humans exist by their interrelationship with all other parts of nature. It is unrealistic to think of one's self as an isolated thing from the rest of nature.

Although the consciousness of protecting life and living environment has been greatly concerned at present in the world, Buddhism is one of the main basic laws which were

set out by the Buddha after the understanding of the reality. The Buddha established a complete compassion and is respectfully seen as the compassionate protector of all beings. He taught that for those who wish to follow his Path should practice loving-kindness and not to harm the lives of all beings or not only to protect mankind, but also to protect animals and vegetation. With his perfect wisdom, He saw all beings in the universe were equal in nature, and in this phenomenal world, lives of all human and animals were inter-related, mutually developing in an inseparable relationship. Therefore, when analyzing the teachings of the Buddha, it is possible to realize how the Buddha has emphasized the importance of protecting the environment.

Objective

The objective of this research is to investigate into the Buddhist view concerning environment as presented in canonical texts. As a result of human activities, the whole world is encountering severe issues ecologically. The environmental protection will result in the well-being of the mankind. Therefore, the purpose of this research paper is to present some of the views presented in Buddhist doctrine regarding the conservation of environment.

Methodology

With the purpose of finding the perspective of Buddhism on environment protection, Buddhist canonical texts were mainly used in this research.

Research Problem

What are the factors presented in Buddhism regarding the environment protection?

Discussion and Analysis

The Value of the Natural Environment and Buddhism

It is possible to see that there has been a close connection between Buddhism and the natural environment from the time that Bodhisattva prince Siddhartha was born under the blossoming *Sâla* tree in the Lumbini Park up to the present day. Another early story recounts the young prince accompanying his father king *Suddhodana* to the ploughing ceremony at the opening of the snowing season. The prince sat under a rose-apple tree and while concentrating on his breath attained the first meditative absorption (*jhâna*) later, as a young man, the prince abandoned the palace and become a wandering ascetic at the banks of the River *Anomâ*. He travelled to a mountainous and forested area and studied with the two famous teachers: *âlâraKâlâma* and *Uddakarâmaputta*. Following this he practiced austerities and meditation in *Uruvela* locality by the river *Nerañjarâ*. After his enlightenment he taught the Dhamma to group of five disciples at the deer park in *Isipatana*. For forty-five years the Buddha travelled and taught the Dhamma to people until the time that he passed away in the *Sâla*-tree grove, a park in the kingdom of the Mallians.

The reported connection between Buddhism and the natural environment is not accidental or insignificant; rather it is intentional and important. Places of natural abundance, especially those full of forests, rivers, birds, cicadas and flowers, are 'suitable abodes' (*patirûpadesa*), because they contain clear air which helps to remove toxins from the human body. These beneficial influences can be verified by science. Before attaining enlightenment as the Buddha, the

Bodhisattva developed the 'perfection' (*pâramitâ*) for five hundred and forty-seven lifetimes- a time comprising 'one hundred thousand world cycles and four incalculable periods,' from his birth as the young man *Sumendha* until his birth as prince Siddhartha. After all this time he was surely well aware of which places are suitable to live in which places are suitable to practice the Dhamma and develop the mind. For this reason, the important incidents in the Buddha's life occurred in places of natural abundance.

There are many passages in *Tipi akas* describing the material importance of the natural environment. In some instances the natural environment contains valuable resources and animals. An example is when the Bodhisattva as *atree-deva* asked the Brahman who is sweeping at the trunk of a tree: 'Brahman, you know that this tree possesses no mind; it cannot hear and has no feelings. Why then do you make the effort and continually ask it about sleeping happily?' the Brahman replied: 'Large trees only grow in remote, tranquil places, and they are the dwelling places of *devas*. Because of the valuable natural resources I pay respects to this tree and its incumbent *devas*.' The tree *deva* confirmed these words by saying: 'at the foot of a large focus tree growing in front of a persimmon that is surrounded by a fence and formerly honored by people there is a hidden treasure that belongs to no-one. Go and dig this treasure up' (*Jâtaka Tales*, Vol., I) although this story resembles a fable and lacks substantiating evidence, it still could be true.

The natural environment is sometimes a location providing medicinal plants. On one occasion when the Buddha was residing at the *jetagrove* near *Sâvattimany* of the monks came down with fever and required medicinal roots. The Buddha said: 'Monks, I allow the use of medicinal

roots-turmeric, ginger, sweet flag, arum, galangal, *vetiver*; nut grass, and other medicinal roots that are not considered food. When these medicines are offered they can be kept for one's entire lifetime. If there is a necessity, monks can consume these; if there is no necessity, there is a minor offense for consuming them.' The Buddha allowed other natural medicines, for example oils like neem-oil, leaves like neem leaves, and fruits like myrobalan. (Vinaya PiṭakaMahāvagga).

What do these texts teach us? They teach that the natural environment is a rich source of medicinal substance, which have tremendous value for human beings. A closer examination reveals that various leaves, vines and plants, including mushrooms, have medicinal qualities without exception.

Contribution of Buddhism for the Environment

Some changes are easy to implement. Certain Buddhist teachers have already made suggestion to their communities, more than a hundred to date, including:

1. Reducing meat consumption or becoming vegetarian. This is an act of compassion and lessens one's impact on the depletion of resources. A kilo of beef needs some 100,000 liters of water against 750 liters for the production of a kilo of wheat. Providing vegetarian meals at meeting will reduce one's ecological foot-print.
2. Living simply. This put into practice one's vows of ethical conduct without superfluous possessions.
3. Reducing one's use of plastic. We use plastic packaging for a few hours, sometimes even a few

minutes, whereas it takes 500 years to degrade completely. Recycle activity.

4. When offerings are made, adopt healthy solution. Buy fruit rather than sweet things, plant flowers instead of cutting them.
5. Plant trees
6. Transform one's mind

The aim is to encourage a change of direction in the human race. This requires mobilization of ordinary citizen, as we have already seen. A dominant minority does not impose a right direction. For this, much greater awareness is necessary, putting essential emphasis on the role of education.

Buddhist Teachings in Protecting the Environment

Those who do not have right vision towards the environment will behave in a manner that is destructive to the environment. In the biological environment, there are plants that produce seeds from the roots, from the trunk, from the stem, from tender leaves and from within seeds. The Dhamma teaches to avoid destroying such plants and it is considered as a virtuous practice of the person who has right view. "*mūlabījamò, khandhabījamò, phulubījamò, aggabījamò, bījamevapañcamamò itivāitievārūpābījā gamābhūtagāmasam ārādhāpaṭiviratohoti...*" (Dīganikāya I, 6) from this we must understand one thing. Just because someone has huge knowledge of science it does not mean that the environment will be protected by that person. Together with the knowledge of the facts that person should also be sensitive towards environment through the knowledge of the *Dhamma*.

Everything in the world and everyone in the world are interconnected to each one in somehow. This is a co-operation to keep the world out of complications. In the Milindapañha, it mentions what a tree can give to a man. (Milindapañho 409)

1. *Rukkhonâmapupphaphaladharo*. This is the most important thing of a tree that it is giving fruits and flowers without expecting anything for the benefit of human beings.
2. *Rukkhoupagatamanupaviṭṭhânamò châyâdeti*. The tree provides its shadow to anyone who approaches it for resting. Therefore, human beings should have such gratitude towards trees. We should not break even a branch of the tree which we already got some benefit. If one breaks, he is considered as treacherous one. (Pethhavattupâli 2006). p. 54)
3. *Rukkhocâyâvemattamò nakaroti*. The tree provides its shadow to anyone who approaches it without any discrimination, even to a person who comes with an idea of cutting it.

In a spectacular world, this is what we get from a tree. But in turn people do not do much to protect trees. To find success through Buddhist liberation, the jungles are the places that people find to be useful. There are jungles that are so naturally beautiful which normal persons cannot appreciate.

“*Ramanòyâniaraññâniyatthanaramatījano*
Vītarāgaramessantinatekāmāgavesino” (Dhammapada 99)

Even prince Siddharatha chose the jungle to meditate. Even after he became the Buddha, he never forgot to mention

that to the monks. This evidence proves the significance of natural environment.

“I considered: this is an agreeable piece of ground; this is a delightful grove with a clear flowering river with pleasant, smooth banks and nearly a village for aims resort. This will serve for the striving of a clansman intent on striving” and I sat down there thinking: ‘this will serve for striving’ (The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha, 114)

Concerning the Buddhist ethical teachings of the environment, it mentions not to pollute the green grass and the pure water. Using the green grass as toilets and dropping garbage are prohibited in the *bhikkhunòivibhanga*, *pâcittiyapâli*. If any monk commits so, it is considered as an offence. There are several rules concerning the environment. Using river as toilets or spitting on water is also prohibited. “*Na udakeuccâramò vâpassâvamò vâkhelamò vâkarissâmītisikkhâkaranòyâ.*” (pâcittiyapâli)

Love and care towards the animal world is thoroughly mentioned in Buddhism. It includes the human and all animals. When one gives up killing living beings, give up arms and looks at every living beings in a humanitarian way becomes the morality of particular person.

‘Abandoning the taking of life, he dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings.’ (The long Discourse of the Buddha 44)

In Buddhism it is considered that protecting and servicing as the responsibility of government. In the *Cakkavattisīhanâdasutta* it is said as follows:

