

Taking Care of Mother Earth from a Buddhist Perspective

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Abstract—It has become crucial for the human arena in general and the philosophical arena in particular to ponder on the issues of Environmental havoc and to suggest a way for a holistic life with the environment. The problem of environmental crisis can be discussed both from Western and Indian perspectives. So far we have been used of discussing it from the western point of view but it is the time that we take recourse to the significant insights in the Indian tradition to tackle this problem. Therefore, the objective of my paper is to emphasize especially on the Buddhist solution to environmental havoc through their fundamental principle's/teachings: namely (i) The Four Noble Truths, (ii) The Eight-fold Path, (iii) The Doctrine of Dependent origination, (iv) The Five Cosmic Laws and (v) The Doctrine of Middle Path. Further, it is hoped that the present study will help to create awareness that each individual should realize their responsibility for preserving, conserving and caring the environment, to make it a part of their daily life, to create the same attitude in their families, and to spread it to the community.

Methodology- The paper will be analytical in nature and the data for this study has been collected from secondary sources.

Keywords: *Pañca Niyāma Dhamma, The Four Noble Truths, Aṣṭaṅgika Mārga, Praṭītyasamutpāda, Madhyamā pratipad.*
Paper type- Research Paper

1. INTRODUCTION

We are at the turning point of our journey as the present scenario of our environment is at stake due to various threats: global warming, acid rain, drought, flood, typhoons, land slides/erosions, tsunamis and many other kinds of environmental devastation. It is there at all around the globe. There is a need to take serious action to overcome threatening human wellbeing worldwide, if human wants to stop all these sufferings. The Great Dharma Guru, Buddha has given guidelines since 2500 years ago, on how and what should be done to overcome the sufferings. In general, the Buddhist sees craving, aversion, and delusion within the human mind as the root causes for human suffering due to environment destruction. It is the Buddhist teachings which offer us how to overcome the negative forces of greed (lobha), aversion (doṣa), and delusion (moha), essentially develops on a moral code of conduct for human beings, teaches that there is a very close interconnectedness/interdependence between the natural

environment and the sentient beings living in it, that there is a sense of universal responsibility for both mankind and nature. The world is the container - our house and we are the contained- the contents of the container. Without the container, the contents cannot be contained and without the contents, the container contains nothing, it's meaningless. So we have a special mutual relationship of interdependence and interrelatedness. Ignorance of this Interdependence has not only harmed the natural environment, but human society as well.

What we need now is a holistic approach towards problems combined with a genuine sense of universal responsibility based on love and compassion. Environmental destruction is therefore an outer manifestation of an inner affliction. If our thoughts are polluted, then our actions will be polluted too, and so will their consequences.

2. BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF NATURE

The word "Nature" means everything in the world, which is not structured and constructed by man. The Pali correspondents that come closest to "nature" are *loka* (planet/globe) and *yathābhuta* (things as it is).

In Buddhism, Nature is dynamic, not sacred and respecting nature brings Enlightenment. Dynamic means nature is in a continuous flux (*kṣanikvāda*), nothing is static or permanent, everything is changing, its very essence of nature. But though change is a factor inherent in nature, man's moral deterioration hastens the process of change and brings about changes, which are unpleasant to human well-being and happiness. Nature is not sacred means it is just a conditioned world prior to intense human distortion. In other words, the empirical reality of nature is not separate from our transcendental/enlightened nature. When we are enlightened, we have a clear view of the reality of nature. Moreover, in Buddhism, Humans don't have special role in nature, they are neither superior nor inferior but all sentient beings are interconnected and interdependent on each other.

3. BUDDHA'S THREE POISONS OF *LOBHA*, *DOṢA* AND *MOHA*

When mankind is demoralized through greed, famine is the natural outcome; when moral degeneration is due to ignorance, epidemic is the inevitable result; when aversion is the demoralizing force, extensive violence is the ultimate outcome. Buddhism vigorously upholds the virtues of non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion in all human quests.

4. BUDDHA'S FIVE COSMIC LAWS (*PAÑCA NIYĀMA DHAMMA*)

The five cosmic laws are as follows:

- Physical laws (*utuniyāma*) = Season law
- Biological laws (*bījaniyāma*) = Seed law
- Psychological laws (*cittaniyāma*) = Mind law
- Moral laws (*kammaniyāma*) = Action law
- Causal laws (*dhammaniyāma*) = Reality law

According to this theory, in the cosmos there are five natural laws or forces at work. While the first four laws operate within their respective spheres, the last-mentioned law of causality operates within each of them as well as among them. This means that the physical environment of any given area guides the growth and development of its biological component, i.e. flora and fauna. These in turn influence the thought pattern of the people interacting with them. Thought process determines moral standards. The opposite process of interaction is also possible. The morals of man influence not only the psychological framework of the people but the biological and physical environment of the area as well. Thus the five laws reveal that man and nature are bound together in a mutual causal relationship i.e. changes in one necessarily brings changes in another.

5. FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

After enlightenment, Buddha had the clarity to identify **four real truths** to life, namely: (i) There is a suffering, (ii) There is a cause of suffering, (iii) There is a cessation of suffering and (iv) The way to end suffering. The first truth is that life is full of suffering. The second truth is that suffering generally comes from desire and ignorance. The third truth is that through insight and aloofness from aspiration, our suffering will come to an end. And the fourth truth is that through a practice of the Buddhist **Eight-fold path**, enlightenment can be achieved.

There is an element of green politics in these four noble truths. Overconsumption, greediness, and laziness cause suffering because they are tied to desires and ignorance's. This is not just suffering of the human species but also of the planet. Disentanglement from materialism and education on more

sustainable ways of living leads to a more enlightened life and a healthier planet.

I believe that this suffering is caused by ignorance, and that people inflict pain on others in pursuit of their own happiness or satisfaction. Yet true happiness comes from a sense of intrinsic peace and contentment, which in turn must be achieved through cultivation of altruism, of love, of compassion, and through the elimination of anger, selfishness and greed. If we have a true appreciation for others and resist acting out of ignorance we will take care of the Mother Earth. The Buddha refused to answer questions, which did not directly or indirectly bear on the central problem of human suffering and its ending.

6. THE MIDDLE PATH (*MADHYAMĀ PRATIPAD*)

Moreover, according to Buddhist teaching, instead of affirming or rejecting any extreme point of view, we should uphold the middle position/path. A path which opens the eyes, and which guides towards peace, insight, supreme wisdom and enlightenment, which is the Eight-fold path.

7. THE EIGHT-FOLD PATH (*AṢṬAṄGIKA MĀRGA*)

(i) **Right view**

(ii) **Right resolve**

(iii) **Right Speech**

(iv) **Right Conduct**

(v) **Right Livelihood**

(vi) **Right Effort**

(vii) **Right Mindfulness**

(viii) **Right Concentration**

Of these Right speech, right action and right livelihood pertain to conduct; right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration to discipline; and the remaining two right view and right resolution to knowledge and wisdom. Perfect knowledge is insight into the nature of existence and the factors that produce craving and suffering; perfect discipline, coupled with perfect knowledge, enables one to master the cravings; and perfect conduct, guided by perfect knowledge and discipline, leads to a life free from all forms of suffering and bondage. Such a life is the life of wisdom, a life no longer labouring under the burden of ignorance.

Furthermore, we should have goodwill of upholding equality among other sentient beings. We should pay more respect for others' rights, more concern for other people's life, and more clear realization of our sameness as human beings. We should have the right thought of love, kindness, and compassion. This leads to the benevolent relationship among each individual in the ecosphere. Thus the environmental crisis will be reduced, and can gradually be recovered to its equilibrium.

8. PRATĪTYASAMUTPĀDA (DEPENDENT ORIGINATION)

According to Buddhist teaching the change in the nature is not random or accidental, but a causal ontological law, known as *Pratītyasamutpāda*, governs it. Buddhism teaches that man and nature are interconnected and to think of them as separate entities is an error. If we look at the Buddhist doctrine of Dependent Origination it clearly suggest that nothing exist independently of its own, but all things in the world exist in correlation with one another. Further it also suggests the ways to overcome problems from its origin in an elaborated form through a causal formula as:

(i) Origination (arising) aspect

When this (cause) is present, that (effect) comes to be; and on the arising of this (cause), that (effect) arises.

(ii) Cessation aspect

When this (cause) is absent, that (effect) does not come to be;

And on the cessation of this (cause), that (effect) ceases.

Or again:

X causes Y

When X is present, so is Y

When X is absent, so is Y

When X ceases, so is Y

Briefly stated, the Dependent Origination consists of twelve stages/links: ignorance, karmic action, consciousness, body-and-mind, the six sense organ, sense-object contact, sense experience, thirst, clinging, becoming, birth and finally, old-age-and-death. These twelve stages can be described in both forward and backward way with each can be the cause and effect for each other. Moreover, these twelve links cover three lives; former life, current life and future life.

Now when we apply this formula for solving the problem of Global warming, it can be characterized as follows: first with the arising of the problem; because of ignorance, we perform various actions; because of actions we are aware of sensations. Because of the awareness of sensation, body and mind are formed and ready to function. Because of the presence of body and mind, six senses are equipped. Because of the sense bases, there is a sense-object contact and this contact generates sense experience of pleasure, pain or indifference. Due to sense experience we have an aspiration to seek enjoyable sense object and consume products. That is there arises consumerism, because of consumerism there arises production of the commodity, because of commodity production, there arises extraction of resources, because of resource mining there arises releasing of green-house gases and because of which there arises climate change and Global warming.

And when we reverse the process we can understand how the problem comes to an end. We may begin with controlling our sense desire by being content with what we need not what we want. Then consumerism is reduced, less consumerism reduces commodity production, and less production brings fewer resources extraction. With less resources extraction, the emission of green-house gas is reduced and hopefully it will decrease the dangers predicted as the consequences of climate change.

Thus we can conclude that negative process leads to bad motivation which further leads to wrong action and which finally result in suffering/harming to humans/animals/nature and on the other side positive process leads to good motivation which further leads to good action and which finally results in the well-being of everyone in the cosmos.

9. BUDDHIST ICONIC CONNECTION WITH NATURE

Further it was under a tree that the great Saga Buddha born , under a tree, he overcame passion, and attained enlightenment . Under two trees he passes in Nirvana Verily, thus the Buddha held the tree in great esteem .

10. CONCLUSION

The earth is not only the general heritage of all humanity but also the ultimate source of life. By over-exploiting its resources we are undermining the very basis of our own life. Therefore, the preservation and conservation of the Mother earth is not a moral or ethical question but a question of our own existence/survival. How we respond to this challenge will affect not only this generation but also many generations to come. We have the capacity and the responsibility, We must act before it is too late. We can adopt a meaningful path towards ecological solutions only by recognizing these truths mentioned above.

Buddhism offers man a simple moderate lifestyle eschewing both extremes of self-deprivation and self-indulgence. Contentment with basic human necessities, reduction of wants to the minimum, frugality, and satisfaction are its important characteristics. Each man has to regulate his life on standard principles, exercise self-discipline in the enjoyment of the senses, accomplish his duties in his various societal roles, and conduct himself with wisdom and self-awareness in all activities. This seems to be the only way of overcoming the present scenario of environmental havoc.

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