

A Role of Buddhism for the Solution of Today's Environmental Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The study was made to understand the recent ecological crisis due to environmental pollution and to find out the way of solution of the crisis under the Buddhist concept. In our modern society environmental crisis is one of the biggest problems. Nowadays we search for our modern comfort and pleasure by exploiting nature without any moral values. This exploitation is the main cause of environmental crisis like deforestation, desertification, decrease of biodiversity, acid rain, global warming, depletion of the ozone layer and water pollution etc. The use of various types of chemicals like fertilizers and pesticides, endocrine-disrupting chemicals and the food additives in the agricultural field leads to serious environmental crisis causing destruction of the living base of the human race at the present and the near future and makes a big problem to our nature. In this study the environmental problems has been analysed under Buddhist concept for its solution. The concept of Buddhism focuses on all living things and being friendly to the nature. There is no history of destroying the living things occupying, encroaching their habitat in the Buddhist philosophy. The Buddhist essence indicates that the ethical values of nature do not conflict with the presence of human as a part of the nature. The most important concern in the Buddhist philosophy is the development of an ethos that supports a sustainable lifestyle in the society. Besides man both the plants and animals have a right to live and share the Earth's resources and living space. Man has no right to push a species towards extinction that has taken millions of years for its origin. Several counter actions have been taken for environmental complications. Buddhist philosophy encourages people to Truth-Goodness-Beauty leading to the world to peace, comfort, happiness and a healthy environment to live in. Buddhism motivates human beings to do well with a harmonious life with one's surroundings and generates sensitivity in the mind of the human being. Buddhism leads to the cessation of suffering and starting of enlightenment and happiness. It always encourages us to protect our living environment. We must practice the Eightfold Noble Path teaching as propagated by the Buddha for the remedy of worldwide problems, including the environment issues. The Eightfold Noble Path teaching consists of right vision, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right efforts, right mindfulness and right concentration. Buddhist philosophy involves every human being to consider the manner in which the performance of his duties as employee would effect on society and the future. Buddhism is one of the most prominent traditions which encourage ecological responsibility towards the preservation of healthy living environment with a realistic perspective where humanity would prosper.

Key Words : Environmental crisis, Buddhism, Eightfold noble path teaching, Sustainable lifestyle

INTRODUCTION

Our environment has many problems as it is influenced by every living species of the plants or animals. Besides man all life in earth is precious. All plants and animals play the significant role in maintaining the harmony

within living and nonliving environment. We forget that environment is not a creation of man instead man is the creation of environment. The man does not want to listen to the voice of nature. He does not try to understand the inter dependent relationship between man and the environment. Different anthropogenic activities and

technological advancement cause deforestation, global warming, ozone depletion, loss of biodiversity, pollution etc. through accumulation of more and more harmful materials in the environment. We know that we should protect our living environment reducing the amount of garbage through recycling. We have no right to push a species towards extinction that has taken millions of years for its origin. Several counter activities have been taken for environmental complications. Buddhist philosophy encourages people to Truth-Goodness-Beauty leading to the world to peace, comfort, happiness and a healthy environment to live in. Buddhism motivates human beings to do well with a harmonious life with one's surroundings and generates sensitivity in the mind of the human being. Buddhism leads to the cessation of suffering and starting of enlightenment and happiness. It always encourages us to protect our living environment. Buddhist philosophical teaching can make people believe that environment wholly depends on them. Henning states that both Buddhism and Deep Ecology "...use values and perspectives that are based on spiritual and holistic principals for positive change in attitude and practises." The Buddhist teaching helps a man to achieve various objectives and reach an ultimate goal in an environment. On the other hand environment also helps a man to possess control over his mind and verbal behaviour. Buddhism says all about moral values of the environment. Buddhist environmentalism is short but it has deep values and ethics to look at, it inspires every human being to practice eco spiritual activities on the basis of Buddhism.

Ecology and its Buddhist approach:

Ecology is based on the study of the relationship between living organism and their environment. Ecological disaster has been a key problem in the environmental degradation in our adjacent. Ecological catastrophe occurs when the surrounding environment of a species or a population changes. Ecology is a study where components such as air, water, soil, plant, animals, and micro organisms all are taken into account. Human ecology deals with human being and their environment. Ecological crisis should be solved for the betterment of the environment. There are many reasons for ecological crisis those are unfavourable conditions for the survival of a species increase pressure of predation, changes in non biotic or biotic ecological factors.

There are two types of Ecology : **Scientific ecology and Deep ecology**. **Scientific ecology** involves the

relationship between species and their environment. It is a study of distribution and abundance of living organisms are effected by inter actions between the organisms and their environment. This relationship is different from the object of study. The environment of an organism includes both physical properties (insolation, climate and geology) as well as the other organisms that share its habitat.

Deep ecology refers to the study which involves ourselves and finds our way to protect the environment in this living planet. This is a relationship that involves participation of man who is connected to the environment. It also involves the moral and ethical values towards the environment. Deep Ecology is a wider process and it differs from Scientific Ecology. Every individual can experience deep ecology in the environment if their moral values allow them. This ecology tells us to see ourselves as art of the earth together with all the other living beings and not just as individuals. It also refers us to protect the environment the way we would protect our own life.

A new concept called **Radical ecology** has come from a sense of crisis in this commercial world. It acts on the perspective of the dominations of human beings along lines of race class and gender .It emphasises people to make changes in the world in accordance with social visions. People who understand ecology may realize that ecological responsibility is related to religions and philosophy. Religions play an important role in developing and promoting ecological ethics and strategies to demolish hindrances in human thought. Religions are a strong influence for changing the behaviours and established a connection towards others. Buddhism is one of the friendliest religions which encourage ecological responsibility towards others.

Gautama Buddha was born in the forest under a sal tree (*Shorea robusta*). He attained enlightenment in the forest under the Bodhi tree (*Ficus religiosa*). He used to teach in the forest and dwelt in forest. Buddha also instructed his disciples to seek peace in forest and he passed away in the forest. Therefore monks retreat into the depth of forest and mountains to seek isolation which would enhance the course of meditations and realizations of values of Buddha's teachings. Living a life in forest allows the monks to simplify their minds and character. This helps to continue and practice the ecological responsibilities of life. Gautama Buddha's teachings are full of environmental ethics and ecological values. There are three aspects in Buddhism for understanding the environmental ethics. These aspects are physical

environment, social environment and spiritual environment. Buddhism is all about ethics and moral values that respect biodiversity. Buddhist believes that natural processes are affected by human behaviour. A social responsibility is very important for the environment. Humans, animals and trees should work together as a cooperative. If the environment is degraded people will not be able to enjoy a complete life. Affecting the nature people affect themselves and the lives of future generations.

Environmental aspects of Buddhist teaching:

Buddhism emphasises practices over beliefs. Buddhism is related to right practices of human beings. Buddha taught to demolish sufferings with the true nature of the world he believed that knowledge is important as far as it remains practical. Buddhist usually follows ethics and morals to promote ecological up gradations. Lord Buddha always told his followers to focus and follow the Eight Fold Path which would make them free from any kind of sufferings. This also helps us to avoid fraud corruption and crime. Eight fold path is based on four noble truth. Four Noble Truths is a concept of 1. Suffering: Whatever is born is subject to decay which in turn results in suffering, 2. Cause of Suffering: Emotional attachments like birth and death, 3. Cessation of Suffering: Not reacting to the feelings and attachment, 4. Path to Cessation of Suffering: The noble eight fold paths with three main characteristics are morality, mental discipline and wisdom.

Morality (*sila*) and its environmental aspects:

In this context morality deals with five precepts (*Panchasila*) of the noble eight fold path of the teachings of *dhamma*. Sulak states that "all Buddhist accept the five precepts (*Panchasila*) as their basic ethical guidelines using this as a handle, we know how to deal with many of the real issues of our day" (Sulak, 1992). The five precepts coming under morality are 1. Not to kill any living being. Carefulness, mindfulness and charity for others make a perfect and happy environment for everyone. Lord Buddha believed in preventing the natural habitat and the environment, and thus he also told not to cut the branches of the tree, not to use the leaves, he also told eating fruits having seeds which are to be grown and rather he told how to use the natural resources wisely. Buddhism tells us not to harm any living beings in this environment instead we should protect them and it

maintains our eco system, 2. Not to pilfer anything. Borrowing a thing with the intension of not returning it comes under the category. The nature is the owner of our eco system which means that the natural recourses including water, land, and forest are owned by the nature that means human beings don't have the right to harm or affect them. This will lead to destructions for the future generations, 3. Not to involve in sexual misconduct. Sulak states, "like the other precepts we must practice this in our own lives, refraining from exploiting others. In addition we have to look at the Global structures of male dominance and the exploitation of women" (Sulak, 1992). The environments are directly affected with one's greed for lust. The one who is free from lust is a responsible human being for the environment, 4. Not to lie. Lying or not telling the truth can lead to miscommunications among people. Using unfriendly words degraded dignity and status of a living being. Lying or manipulating people is done to deceive them which affects the human rights of an environment. In this way moral values and dignity of a person gets demoralised, 5. Not to involve in intoxication. Involving ourselves in intoxications can lead to many evil ways which is not beneficial for the environment. Consumption of alcohols and drugs affects the family as well as the environment. These activities contribute illegal acts which exploits the environment.

Mental discipline (*Samadhi*) and its environmental aspects:

Mental discipline (*Samadhi*) comprises the factors like Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration of the Noble Eight Fold Path. It basically determines the state of mind of a person. The mind should be used wisely for all ethics and moral values it involves meditation so that our mind does not get diverted into other immoral activities. This process leads a human being achieve wisdom. Mental discipline also deals with awareness and mindfulness. This acts as a progressive attitude towards the betterment for our environment. If the performances of a man are done with awareness, sensation, carefulness, emotions and mindfulness, then it can be achieved. Perfect blend of elements like meditation, emotion, concentration and mindfulness of a person can be very helpfulness of a person can be very helpful to nature and to achieve wisdom. Buddhism defines mindfulness and concentration very elaborately. The main practiced meditation in Buddhism is mindfulness with breathing. To get connected with the nature is one

of the greatest pleasures one can get in his life. Buddha always preferred to be in forest and stay connected with the nature which made him so involved with the environment. The forest provides natural, undisturbed and peaceful surroundings for those who seek quiet and solitude for meditation.

Wisdom (*Panna*) and its environmental aspect:

Buddhist teaching is enriched because of the four noble truth. Lord Buddha left his palace for the remedy of all sufferings of the living beings. He wanted to find out the reason of suffering of the people and that is how he found out the Four Noble Truth.

- I. **First Noble Truth-*dukkha* (Suffering):** Human being always wants to be happy and desires perfectness or peace in his life but suffering does not allow people to be always happy. Whatever is born will definitely decay one day and we cannot escape this law. And this is one of the main reasons why we suffer. This is an inevitable suffering which exploits the living environment and makes human world suffer. Suffering occurs due to the attachment to a particular thing or people which leads to suffering at the end.
- II. **Second Noble Truth-*Samudaya* :** The second noble truth defines the cause of suffering. The reasons behind suffering are attachment, desires, affections etc. A suffering comes due to the things or people we possess, when we are attached to something we don't want to lose it and that leads to suffering. Desiring something and non fulfilment of that desire dissatisfy us which again leads to suffering. In this environment if we do not depend on materialistic things we can find inner peace.
- III. **Third Noble Truth- *Nirodha*:** The Third Noble Truth is actually about the realisation of mental pain or sorrow. Our senses make us feel or anything, for anyone that leads to attachment. Buddhist teaching says that *Dukkha* comes due to the unconditional love or craving we have. This craving will at the end lead us to suffering. Therefore, if we want to get rid of *Dukkha* we have to remove the cause of sufferings we will have to be indifferent to all kinds of attachments and that will lead to a griefless environment.

IV. **Fourth Noble Truth-*Magga*:** The fourth noble truth defines the way by which we can end the cause of suffering it shows us the path to overcome the suffering. The path actually projects love and noble performances which lead to ultimate happiness . This is how the Noble eight fold path was introduced.

The Noble Eight Fold Path comprises of Right Understanding, Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

To lead a healthy life in this environment one must have the above qualities within him. These will help to realise that suffering and exploitation dissatisfies mental states. Thus to lessen the suffering one should be able to follow the Noble Eight Fold Path. If someone can truly follow the NOBLE EIGHT FOLD PATH then he will overcome the evil states of mind that he has within himself. Buddhist teaching says that if we want to gain perfect wisdom we will have to be indifferent to all kinds of craving, emotional attachments and desires.

The value of Buddhist teaching in the Era of modern civilization:

In the present scenario our environment is disturbed due to the reasons like violence, war, riot and racism, pollution, industrialization etc. We are solely responsible for the destruction of our balanced environment. We no more care for our heavenly environment. Violence, intolerance and war are the reason for the destruction of the environment. The case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is an example of this event. Now a day we search for our modern comfort and pleasure by exploiting nature without any moral values. This exploitation is the main cause of environmental crisis like desertification, decrease of biodiversity, acid rain, global warming, depletion of the ozone layer and water pollution etc. The use of various types of chemicals like fertilizers and pesticides, endocrine-disrupting chemicals and the food additives in the agricultural field leads to serious environmental crisis causing destruction of the living base of the human race at the present and the near future and makes a big problem to our nature. Construction of dams which restricts the natural way of rivers, using of dynamites for the purpose of making roads and other constructions in hilly area affects our environment. Deforestation is another example that affects our environment and it is the main reason for soil erosion. Releasing of chemicals

and pollutants from the industries affects the marine life too. Animal killing for various reasons also affects the ecological balance for our environment. Buddhism involves caring, loving and sensitive attitude toward the environment. It believes in non violence.

Buddha's teaching for the protection of plant and animal life:

The teachings of Buddha give sympathy to all the living beings present in our environment. Buddhism believes that it is possible that our own relatives can be reborn as animals. Therefore, it is our first and foremost duty to treat animals with care and kindness in our environment. Buddhism also defines that plants and trees are also a part of living things of our environment so we should protect them and have a reverential attitude towards them. Moreover, Vanaspati in Pali means "lords of the forests". Buddhist teaching emphasises in the protection of trees and forests as Buddha attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. In today's world deforestation is widely performed which destroys the ecological balance and that directly affects our environment. Thus, it is our duty to take care of our resources which includes plants and trees.

Buddha's teaching for the protection of marine life:

We all know the fact that water is the life to all living things in this environment. It is a very helpful element which plays an important role in our environment. Water helps us in various ways. Buddhist teachings tell us to protect the water as that is a natural resource and we should use it wisely. Water can be a great relief to all living things. Marine life should also be protected in the environment. Pollutants from the factories and industries are released into the water which affects the lives of marine world. Releasing of chemicals and oils are very harmful for the marine life. Construction of dams and reservoirs on the rivers also affect the environmental balance. Water should be preserved and not wasted. Farmer should use the water wisely. Lord Buddha preached that wasting of water should be stopped and we always should preserve its purity as water is a natural resource which is very important for our environmental balance.

Buddha's teaching of recycling and management:

Recycling sustains the substitution of raw material inputs into waste outputs out of the economic system.

Recycling is a key component of waste reduction. It is mainly a process of converting waste into new objects. Lord Buddha believed in recycling of waste materials into new objects and showed that there should be method of dumping waste into the environment. Our environment should not be used carelessly. Recycling and waste management sometimes determine the preservation of the environment. Buddhist teachings tell us not to dump waste to spoil the environment rather to recycle things which are of no use and use them in various ways. We should use all the economic resources in ethical way.

Solve the problem by practice and action :

Solving the environmental issues and hazards need to be done in an ethical way so that resources do not get affected. Behaviour of people should be ideal towards the environment. Our environment needs good conduct and behaviour from the human society. Good intentions for the better environment should be designed by the human world. Buddhism believes that solving and eradicating environmental problems is itself a part of practising Buddhism. Solving any environmental problem is a natural aspect of Buddhist philosophy. Harming any part of an environment defines that we are not protecting the environment. To be in peace one should avoid making crimes, killing others and harming any species. Various steps should be taken to preserve our expensive environment. Buddhist teachings should be utilized for motivating the modern human world to preserve the environment. If we start protecting the beauty of the nature then only we will find happiness and fulfilment in this natural world.

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