

Buddhism Attitude towards Nature an Eco- Philosophical Perspective

Vijaya S.M.Indira.M

Department of Philosophy Icpr Jrf Andhra University Visakhapatnam 530003
Andhrapradesh, India

Abstract

Buddhism mainly focuses on the teachings of the Buddha. Buddha was regarded as an ethical teacher. He also regarded as a mystic teacher. The state of nature is a concept in moral and political philosophy used in religion, social contract theories and international law to denote the hypothetical conditions of what the lives of people might have been like before societies came into existence. It focuses on the four noble truths, the noble eight fold path and the doctrine of dependent origination. which is towards nature an eco philosophical perspective .

KEYWORDS: Buddhism Nature, Noble truths

Introduction:

The term Buddha is a descriptive one which means enlightened one. It is perceived that most people are in the state of being asleep and they are unaware of the real nature of things. So the term Buddha itself asks everyone to wake up and open the eyes towards the realities. It also means that Buddha is an awakened person who clearly understands the real nature of all things in the world. As far as Buddhism is concerned, the person who sees is not important, but ones vision should be enough to understand the real nature of things. Buddhism is less focused on the individual founder but more on his teachings.

Buddhist ecology is prominently known as *non-violent ecology*, in the sense that Buddhism conceives a society as that which is ecologically sustainable and socially just. Non killing and compassionate attitude towards all beings is the core of Buddhist ecology. These who criticize the role of religions in ecology argues that non-violent ecology is a myth or a romantic concept as violence and non-violence are relative terms and all society is basically violent.

Buddhism answers such criticisms in a calmer, more integrated and compassionate ways. Buddhism argues that we should we should wake up from such delusions. Such delusions cause violence and thus suffering for an individual and to those he interacts with it. As competition between animal species and most social interactions are non-violent.

Noble truths:

The whole of Buddha's philosophy may be summarized in his concept of four noble truths.

1. There is suffering (*dukkha*)
2. There is a cause of suffering (*dukkha-samudaya*)

3. There is a cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha*)

4. There is a way leading to this cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-gaminipratipat*)

All these noble truths can be applicable in today's problems related with environmental crisis. The relevance of four noble truths and its remedial action is prescribed mainly for the ordinary responsible individual in society.

- ❖ The first noble truth states that life is full of suffering and even the so called pleasures are fought with pain. So according to Buddha, there is something wrong in our concept of pleasure. The same point is applicable to the environmental crisis in a deeper level. In our run for material pleasure we neglected and destroyed others right to live and exploited nature's resources unlimitedly as if they are only for satisfying man's pleasure. But we never enjoyed anything and are in a deep crisis. Buddhism teaches that peaceful harmony is established only by peaceful co-existence of all species and this can be attained by following the eight fold path. So by following the eight fold path, one can achieve ecological stability and sustainable development. At the deeper level there are several important principles inherent in Buddhism which should be applied by individuals for the creation of a compassionate ecological society.

Kamala bhasin story of the Buddha : Kamala bhasin narrates the story of Buddha which is worth noticing." The story of Buddha childhood is most important in the contexts of our present day debates. Gautam was about 12 years old and was playing in the garden when he saw a beautiful bird falling from the sky. He rushed to the bird, picked it up and saw that the bird had been hit by an arrow. He ran home with the bird and started nursing it. His cousin, J. Husthen, one of his male cousins came rushing in, saying, "Gautam give me my bird, this is my bird, and Gautam asked why the bird was his. The cousin replied "it is mine because I hit it with my arrow and brought it down. Gautam understood what his cousin replied but did not like his logic. He thought for a while and said, you wanted to kill this bird, which means you are its enemy. How can I give the bird to the enemy " I love this bird; I want it to live, so it is mine." Kamala Bhasin says that "those with economic power like Gautam's cousins for profit they will shoot at anything down, for profit they will turn fertile lands to golf courses, exploit seas, and poison lands because they have no love for nature"¹

Buddhism promotes unconditional love, compassionate understanding and charity which are most important for creating an ecologically sustainable society. Lack of unconditional love creates delusion and lack of impassionate understanding creates hatredness and lack of charity creates greed, all of which are the causes of all crisis. All beings including humans and nature are a network of relations which is cyclic in order. The disharmony at one point creates ripples in other, that is why Buddhism prefers a harmonious relationship in society.

Buddhist ethics is mainly based on moral virtue and this virtue is attained when we get free from remorse. According to Buddhism the aim of ethical actions is overcoming of dukkha. Both individually and collectively. On the ecological point of view, Buddhism prescribes that if we want to attain calmness, amicable social relationship and harmony

in nature one should overcome all rules. If we deviate from the rules one is bound to suffer as a natural result of unwholesome actions. These rules one is bound to suffer as a natural result of unwholesome actions. These rules are related with *pratityasamutpada*. Some scholars opine that the Sanskrit word pratitya samutpada is the nearest equivalent in Buddhist sources to our term nature.²

Although there is no direct remark about eco philosophy in Buddhism, Buddhist teachings also contain environmental ethics. Buddhism identifies the unity and welfare of all beings. Nirvana is a positive bliss when the desires and passions have been destroyed and the boundary separating the finite self from its surroundings.

The ecological point in Buddhism is that persons who are initiated into Buddhism start to feel that they are destined to remove dukkha and help others in their path of annihilating dukkha. "As a Buddhist comes to understand the extent of dukkha. In his own life, a natural development is concern about others suffering and deepening compassion. Indeed, the importance of comparing oneself with others is stressed. Since the self of others is dear to each one, let him who loves himself not harm another."³

According to Buddhism one should follow the unity of human nature and it means following the laws of nature which is applicable to all living beings. Thus Dharma means identification of nature of things in environment and even embracing the environment with universal love.

Buddhism strictly prescribes that its monks should limit their consumption of natural resources only for satisfying the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. This point emphasizes about the environmental ethics that, natural resources consumption should be in a limited sense so that sustainability, is maintained. The Buddhist middle way is an ideal path in which one should avoid extremes of denial and over consumerism.

Ahimsa:

The Concept of Ahimsa or non-violence is the common feature of all Indian religious traditions. In Buddhist ethical tradition, non-violence or ahimsa is having prime importance in the list of *Pancasilas* which are known as *gahathasilas* means those meant for common house holders and *dasailas or sikkhapadas* those meant for monks and nuns.⁴ Both Buddhism and Jainism stress the concept of ahimsa on a deeper level, it may be because both these streams of thought stress the need for renunciation of material world and leading a life of nobility without affecting the path of any other being. In practical sense, the use of ahimsa in Buddhism and Jainism is different. Buddhism prefers moderate in practical conduct and Jainism were stringent in applying their rules to the society.

Buddhism believes that the practice of ahimsa will lead to a favorable future birth. Adherence to injury results in an unfavorable destiny to the individual. The act of cruelty also affects the person who is doing cruel to other beings. The person who does cruel things gets affected with impurity and this impurity leads a person to the lower levels of existence. This concept is having a close similarity with Jaina concept of samata, i.e. treating all creatures lower or higher, as equals.⁵ Compassion to animals also comes

under ahimsa, Buddhism strictly prescribe that we should desist any act of doing injury to any animal. The middle path theory of Buddhism view compassion and friendliness as nearest to the concept of ahimsa. These are the positive aspects of ahimsa.

It was King Asoka who put into practice the concept of ahimsa in a full fledged manner. He enforced strict rules for observing the laws related with ahimsa. The sacred edicts of Asoka are rich with his noble acts of kindness towards animals. Ahimsa is practiced not only by keeping away with injuries to nature's sons but also spreading the message of equality and compassion with all creatures.

The positive aspect of ahimsa is the practice of four 'Brahmaviharas; which is viewed as the psychological analysis of the concept of ahimsa.

These *brahmaviharas* are

1. Metta,
2. Karuna,
3. Mudita and
4. Uppeksha

These brahmaviharas are four types of mental stages for purifying one self .

Metta has two stages of projection, positive and negative, like the pedantic concept of avarana and vikshepa. In its positive sense metta is friendliness and in its negative sense it is non-enmity. "it simply means directing love towards all living creatures. It helps ones own self because it minimizes hatred; it helps others on whom it is bestowed because he gets something what he lacks." ⁶ so in its positive sense, metta means having friendliness and love towards all creatures and its negative sense annihilating hatredness towards all creatures and thereby establishing a positive contact between peaceful minds with peaceful world.

Karuna means compassion towards all creatures. It is some sort of self identification with the person who is in deep trouble. It is thinking oneself with others position when others are in distress. Karuna is aroused by seeing others who is in distress condition. In such situation, the intention for enmity and hatredness vanish and karuna is aroused to help others.

The third stage is known as mudita or good will. Mudita is something near to bliss or delight. Mudita means having unselfish love towards all beings. It is some sort of positive detachment. When one loves someone for expecting some favors this creates karmic particles and such love can be transformed to selfishness and such other negative thoughts. Mudita is disinterested love towards all creatures. Mudita creates peaceful and lovable atmosphere and there is no question of any violence. It maintains happiness in oneself and happiness in others. It helps to annihilate selfishness and blind love. The symbol of mudita is joy and delight. Mudita is a feeling of disinterested love, when in others certain virtues are seen; one does not feel envious of others progress and virtues. It

therefore, shows an effort on ones part towards the maintenance of the happiness of others.

Buddhism widely encouraged kindness towards animals as is clear from the evidences from jataka stories. For Buddha kindness towards animals is part and parcel of his day today ethics. "tradition holds that the buddhas favorite residing places were parks and pleasure groves which came into the possession of the early sangha as gifts from wealthy day followers."⁷

It is believed that Buddha attained nirvana underapeepal tree, it is said that seeing Buddha under the peepal tree, people believed that tree god had revealed himself in human form. In Buddhist philosophy, there is mention about three trees associated with attainment of omniscience by Buddha. These trees are known as the trees of enlightenment-asraitha, the tree of goat herd(nyalgrodha) and tree of the serpent king muchalinda.⁸

In all Buddhist literatures compassion is the word which is stressed deeply. Buddhism advocated reverence and compassion for all life. According to Buddhism, the monks should select a natural and peaceful environment for meditation. Traditional Buddhist viharas were in the vicinity of forests and thus these forests became the sacred places. The Buddhists were more concerned with the contemplation of nature through meditation. It was the tradition of india, that those who want to clear the questions about spiritual salvation leaves the household life and engages in deep situation with the forests. Buddhist monks were asked to cultivate the act of solitude and forests were the right place for them Buddhist literatures give a vivid description about Buddhist viharas and caityas which are surrounded by trees.

Buddha strongly opposed and condemned all forms of animal sacrifice. He always advocated for cultivation of sympathy and compassion for all forms of sentient beings. He condemned the infliction of pain and suffering to all beings. He pleaded the kings of the time for not to take part in hunting and the kings were expected o protect the animals too like his subjects. In Buddhism there was an implicit ethics or code of conduct regarding man's relationship with environment. This can be understood by Buddhist literatures which always advocate for humanist philosophy. The concept of pancasila has been greatly employed by Buddhists in detailed description. All the five precepts contain the message of environmental ethics and the importance of a noble, altruistic life.

Combined with pancasila and noble eight fold path, Buddhism can be considered as an ideal philosophy of environmental ethics. Because the five precepts clearly outlines how man should lead a life which does not affect any one harmly and eight fold path is meant for creating a harmonious society. The ultimate aim of Buddhist ethics is the eradication of suffering (nibbana). For attaining nibhana prescribes the total eradication of greed, hatred egoism and cultivation of moral virtues, like compassion, non injury, universal love etc. from the ecological points of view all these points suggest that Buddhism is an eco-philosophy which has deep concern for natural environment and which stands for a harmonious relation between man and nature.

The most important contributions by the Buddha to the world are two things, one is love and another is compassion. Buddha expanded these two principles in such a way that

there is no parallel in history. Both these principles exist side by side like two sides at the coin Love is wish for others to be happy and compassion is the desire to remove suffering others. Buddha extended these two principles to all living beings, people, animals, trees, plants and to the earth as a whole. Martine Batchelor points out that the root of Buddha's compassion is wisdom. Wisdom is not an introverted intellectual quality but as the Buddha explains here, gives rise to spontaneous concern for life." ⁹ Buddha taught that the source of morality is love and respect for life. Morality cannot come simply by following rules and principles without questioning them. A morally right action in Buddhist is abstention from killing breathing things, abstention from stealing, abstention from misconduct in sensual desires.

Buddha never limited his principles of love and compassion to humans alone; he extended these principles to all creature in same manner, Buddha loved man and wild animals in the same way and he extended compassion to all creatures. Buddha realized that the natural environment is : ideal place for cultivating spiritual ideals.

Love and Compassion of the life :

According to Buddha love and compassion should start from individual himself, because everyone has the feeling of suffering and everyone wants to up root its causes. In his search to understand the meaning of human life. Buddha discovery the truth that metaphysical principles are incapable of solving human problems. The true way that sets out hearts free is inside every individual and we have to find the way by existing in the midst of all network of relationship. This relationship includes non human being also.

Nature played a crucial role in evolving Buddha's personality It is on nature's lap that Siddhartha, the young king transformed into a Buddha, an enlightened one. He was born in the midst of natural environment, achieved enlightenment in the midst of nature and attained Mahaparinibhanna, in the midst of nature. So nature and all children of nature influenced him profoundly .It is clear from the facts that he delivered his first sermon at deer park. His teachings were under the shadows of large trees, monasteries constructed without disturbing the natural environment. Meditation was done deep inside the forests. This is the prime reason for Buddha's love and compassion to all creatures."The Buddhist community all over the world has extended popular ritual at Bodhi-Pooja which is performed by pouring water to the root of Bodhi tree and paying respect to it, and other species at the tree. This virtually has helped to preserve the trees even during droughts as well as from human destruction. ¹¹

References:

¹ Kamala Bhasin,(1998) " *Equation for life issues on sustainable development* " Books for change Publishers: Bangalore) p.ii.)

² Ian Harris, (2001) "*Attitude to Nature*", in Peter Harvey, ed., Buddhism (Continuum Publications: London), p.242)

³Peter Harvey, (2004) "*An Introduction to Buddhism-Teachings, history and Practices*" foundation Books :New Delhi) p:197.)

⁴Kamala Jain, (1973) “*The Concept of Pancasila in Indian thought*” (Pv Research institute :Varanassi:) p.73)

⁵ Ibid p.73

⁶ Ibid., P.78.

⁷ Ian Harris, Op.cit, p.249.

⁸ Bansilal Malla, op.cit, p.35.

⁹Martine Batchelor and Kerry Brown, (1994). “*Buddhism and Ecology*” (Motilal Banarsidass:New Delhi) p.6)

¹⁰Ibid p.6

¹¹Avinashkumar Srivastava, “*Buddhist Environmentalism*” in D.C.Srivastava, ed., Op.cit, p.140.