

BUDDHIST APPROACH TO ECOLOGICAL AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

by Vikas Singh*
& Ravindra Kumar**

ABSTRACT

Buddhist always believes in developing compassion and establishing friendly behavior with all creatures of the world. Buddhist perceptions of the world are ecological and based on the theory of sustainable development. Buddhist believes that Eco is essential to solving global problems, not Ego and a compassionate person think for a common future. He develops that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs, not their own greed.

According to Buddhist teachings, there is a close interdependence between the natural environment and the living creatures. Buddha has also considered every creature connected through Pratīyasamutpāda (Dependent Origination). Siddhārtha becomes Buddha under the Bodhi tree which was situated on the bank of Nirañjanā. Different aspects of Buddha's life, such as his birth, attaining knowledge, Dhammacakkapavattana, Mahāparinibbāna etc. were completed in the lap of Mother Nature. On the basis of its ecological and sustainable approach, Buddhist are very generous, compassionate and believer of peace in the world.

*. Dr., Assistant Professor: Department of Sanskrit, Zakir Hussain Delhi College (Evening), University of Delhi, India.

** . Ph.D. Research Scholar: Department of Sociology University of Rajasthan, Jaipur (Rajasthan), India.

The important thing of this paper will be based on the relationship of the ecological aspect and Sustainable development with Buddhist theories like Pratītyasamutpāda (Dependent Origination) and Pañcasīla (five precepts); this paper will also highlighted Buddhist perspective in the present scenario on the issue. This research intends to use analytical, empirical and historical methods. The paper is based on Pāli canonical and non-canonical literature and some other Sanskrit Mahāyāna texts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dham'maṃ care sucaritaṃ na naṃ ducaritaṃ care.

Dham'macārī sukhaṃ seti asmi lōkaṃ paramhi ca.¹

Practice a righteous life and do not practice in a faulty manner. One, who observes this practice lives happily both in this world and in the next. Man is a social and environmental animal. He is not isolated from the environment, but like biological and physical environment he is also a symbiotic. The environment and activities of a human being is interconnected.

The mind with dependent origination can wish for the people of the whole world, that no one creature in this world should be sad, neither sinner, nor sick, nor inferior, nor despised, nor poor.² The welfare of everyone and the development of everyone is the goal of human life. At every level of the society, whether it is a family, a nation, or a world or a whole universe, human beings combined with ideas of ecological and sustainable development increasing compassion.

To introduce Buddhist way and method for sustainable development, there are hundreds of discourses in the Buddhist canon. From them, the Karaṇīyamettasutta of the Khuddakanikāya introduces human to the non human as able, attentive, simple, non arrogant, contended, unbiased etc. and was able to convince them that Buddhist is not a threat to the world apart from this, the teaching of the first precept, Brahma Vihāra, Pratītyasamutpāda, Madhyama

1. Dhammananda, K. (1998). *The Dhammapada*, Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 169 verse.

2. Mā kaścīd duḥkhiṭaḥ sattvo mā pāpī mā ca rogitaḥ.

Mā hīnaḥ paribhūto vā mā kaścicca durmanāḥ. Shastri, Dwarikadas (ed.) (2001). *Bodhicaryāvtāra* of Śāntideva. Varanasi: Bauddhabharati, 10/41, p. 335.

Mārga etc. are highly effective teachings of the Buddha if practiced for a sustainable development. On the basis of its ecological and sustainable approach, Buddhist are very generous, compassionate and believer of peace in the world.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Buddhist always believes in developing compassion and establishing friendly behavior with all creatures of the world. This research paper focused on the Buddhist perceptions of the world which is ecological and based on the theory of sustainable development. How a Buddhist believes in Eco and why he does not believes in Ego? How compassionate people think for a common future? How a person develops the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs, not their own greed?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The important thing of this paper will be based on the relationship of the ecological aspect and Sustainable development with Buddhist theories like first percept, Brahma Vihāra, Pratītyasamutpāda, Madhyama Mārga etc. This paper will also highlight the Buddhist perspective in the present scenario on the issue. This research intends to use analytical, empirical, scientific and historical methods. The paper is based on Pāli canonical and non-canonical literature and some other Sanskrit Mahāyāna texts.

4. DISCUSSION

The aim of human life is to search for wholeness. David Bohm told that the man has always been seeking wholeness - mental, physical, social and individual.³ Human has sensed always that wholeness or integrity is an absolute necessity to make life worth living.⁴ Quantum Physics has proved that no element is free in the whole universe, but each element is interconnected with each other. The movement of a single particle is connected with the entire universe. The interconnection of atoms is the basis of the

3. Bohm, David. (1980). *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. New York: Routledge, p. 3.

4. *Ibid*, p. 4.

whole world. The Biologists also concluded to analyse the theory of Quantum Physics that the relation of human being and nature is interconnected and mutually interdependent. To study the interconnections of humans and the environment at the scientific level, although 'ecology' was born before Quantum Physics, also called 'Environmental Biology'. Ecology is a science that studies the interrelationship between biotic and abiotic components of a natural ecosystem on one hand and among organisms on the other hand.⁵ In simple words, Ecology is a study of nature or study of the environment. In Ecology, we study about living communities and their interactions. The study of Ecology also helps us to understand the basic laws of nature. Due to the increase of human population there are large numbers of negative effects on living communities.

Our ancestors were basically the hunter-gathers. Later we were converted into the agrarian societies and the human footprint. The environment was rapidly increased over the period of time from agrarian to industrial and industrial to organize society. At present we are in the era of post urbanisation. Due to that rapid increase in ecological footprint, we harassed the natural eco-system and living creation. Due to that over exploration of eco-system and earth resources there are drastic consequences are faced by the human itself in the form of climate change, global warming, species extinction, pollution, desertification etc. and after it the human societies trying to find out the solution of those drastic consequences from mid 19th century and in 1972 the United Nations (UN) organised Stockholm conference. It is also known as United Nations Conference on The Human Environment (UNCHE). With that we are trying to find out the Eco friendly alternatives of development and people started to talk about the concept of sustainable development.

In 1983, World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) was established by the UN which is also known as Brundtland commission. The Brundtland Commission released his report entitled *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report, in October 1987. The commission used the term sustainable

5. Singh, Savindra. (1991). *Environmental Geography*. Allahabad: Prayag Pustak Bhawan, p. 47.

development first time and defines it as “Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. It contains two key concepts: the concept of “needs” in particular, the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs.⁶”

Sustainable development deals with the development that promotes the sustainable use of natural resources and also conserving them for our future generation. The planet was a large world in which human activities and their effects were neatly compartmentalized within nations, within sectors (energy, agriculture, trade), and within broad areas of concern (environment, economics, social). These compartments have begun to dissolve. This applies in particular to the various global ‘crises’ that have seized public concern, particularly over the past decade. These are not separate crises: an environmental crisis, a development crisis, an energy crisis. They are all one.⁷

Current concerns for ecological imbalance, global warming and associated environmental problems are the outcome of the disasters at various levels faced by humanity. The innate spirituality in the human society which manifests in the religious life needs to be given due importance in implementing the long term measures and solutions to these ecological problems. All most all the religions have accorded sanctity to the symbiotic relationship between nature, plant kingdom, animal kingdom and human life.

The famous saying of Albert Einstein “science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind⁸” shows us the need of

6. Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future’ (1987) Available at: <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf> (Accessed: 5 January 2019).

7. ‘Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future’ (1987) Available at: <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf> (Accessed: 5 January 2019).

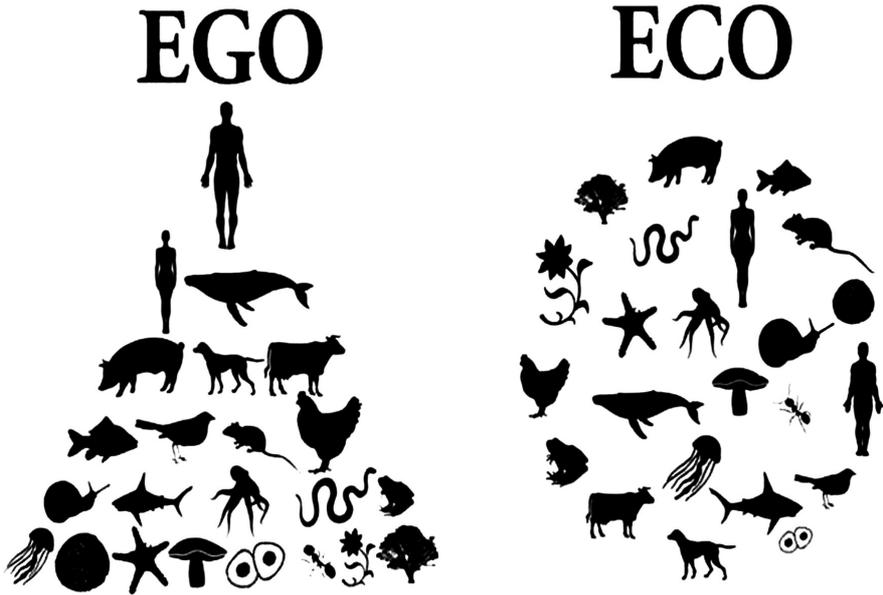
8. Einstein, Albert. (1930). *Religion and Science*. New York Times Magazine, New York, p. 1-4; reprint in Einstein’s book (1949). *The World as I See It*, New York: Philosophical Library,

religion or some kind of philosophy for a balanced life as well as a successful development program. Current economic policies which promote material development have made the world imbalanced and short existing. Buddhism is a religion that has always presented us with tools for paying attention to our surrounding, showing us how we can take responsibility without becoming disillusioned. C. Jotin Khisty believes that spiritually and psychologically we live inside a bubble of the “self,” as though we are “in here” and the rest of the world is “out there.” According to Buddhist thought, this sense of separation manifests itself in the form of the Three Poisons—greed, ill will, and delusion. Examples of these poisons can be seen everywhere in the current ecological crisis. Greed rooted in untrammelled economic growth and consumerism is the secular religion of advanced industrial societies. Similarly, the military-industrial complex promotes ill will, fear, and terror, while propaganda and advertising systems are well known for deluding the public about everything under the sun. A fundamental question of our time is whether we can counter these forces by developing attitudes of respect, responsibility, and care for the natural world and so create a sustainable future.⁹

Buddhist always believes in developing compassion and establishing friendly behavior with all creatures of the world. Buddhist perceptions of the world are ecological and based on the theory of sustainable development. Buddhist believes that Eco is essential to solving global problems, not Ego and a compassionate person think for a common future. He develops that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs, not their own greed.

pp. 24-28. Available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/aor/einstein/einsci.htm> (Accessed: 16 November 2018).

9. Khisty, C. Jotin. *The Marriage of Buddhism and Deep Ecology*. *Quest* 97. 2 (Spring 2009): 64-69. Available at: <https://www.theosophical.org/publications/quest-magazine/42-publications/quest-magazine/1670-the-marriage-of-buddhism-and-deep-ecology> (Accessed: 26 November 2018).



In this figure¹⁰, the two states 'Ego' and 'Eco' are shown. Both tell two different aspects of the environment. The ego is shown at the top of the man and the woman and other creatures below it. Ego means that the condition of the ego is not only for the environment but also for the entire human community. Because it starts to exploit human nature, which not only affects the ecosystem, but it also suffers from problems like pollution and temperature itself. The other picture is related 'Eco.' All organisms, humans and trees are shown in the form of a circle. This theory corroborates cosmology. This is the basis of intense ecological thought. According to Buddhist teachings, there is a close interdependence between the natural environment and the living creatures. Buddha has also considered every creature connected through Pratīyasamutpāda (Dependent Origination). According to the theory of Dependent Origination, everything in the universe is subject to conditioned arising, the natural process of law governed arising according to conditions¹¹

10. <http://www.ecohustler.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Ego-2-Eco.jpg> (Access date – 23 December 2018)

11. Harvey, Peter. (2000). *An Introduction of Buddhist Ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 152.

which means that an entity does not exist and generate independently. Instead, it is characterised by its fundamental interdependence and interconnections to all phenomena.¹²

Siddhārtha becomes Buddha under the Bodhi tree which was situated on the bank of Nirañjanā. Different aspects of Buddha's life, such as his birth, attaining knowledge, Dhammacakkapavattana, Mahāparinibbāna etc. were completed in the lap of Mother Nature. Buddhism takes us from conceiving ourselves as isolated individuals to believing ourselves as associated beings in the universe along with the acquisition of feeling of kindness or goodwill (*Mettā*), compassion (*Karuṇā*), Sympathetic joy (*Muditā*) and equanimity (*Upekkhā*). The four Brahma vihāra will help a great deal to boost the harmonious interpersonal relations among human beings and nature.

Buddhist people believe in cyclic positions of karma and rebirth. Responds to the deep ecology interest in trying to show to others how the human species arose out of other life forms and hence an argument for our responsibility to ensuring the continuity of all life forms and their habitats, not just human life. The first Buddhist precept (*Sīla*) tells about protection of every human and sentient being. It is committed to human beings not to kill any smallest creature or human. Let him not destroy, or cause to be destroyed, any life at all, or allow the acts of those who do so. Let him refrain even from hurting any creature, both those that are strong and those that tremble in the world.¹³

Dalai Lama says in his book 'My Tibet' that the tendency of humans is non-violent. As to the question of human survival, human beings are social animals. In order to survive we need companions. Without other human beings, there is simply no possibility of surviving; that is a law of nature.¹⁴ This is why human beings contemplate on their environment, not only in humans but also in

12. *Ibid*, p. 152.

13. Pāṇaṃ na hanē na ca ghātayēyya, na cānujaññā hanataṃ parēsaṃ. Sabbēsu bhūtēsu nidhāya daṇḍaṃ, yē thāvarā yē ca tasā santi lōkē. Ireland, John D. (tr.). (2013). Dhammika Sutta (Suttanipāta, 2.14). Available at: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.2.14.irel.html>. (Accessed: 30 December 2018).

14. Lama, Dalai. (1995). *My Tibet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 53.

their environment. The true nature of reality transforms one's being in such a way that compassionate action comes naturally.

Buddhism is a highly ethical religion. Buddhism is not a "dominion" religion towards Nature but, as has been noted, state incorporation can bring this about. Buddhism, it seems, can help the religious activist find the inner strength or moral courage to go out and help change this world.

Buddhist believes that the environment is very important not only for this generation but also for future generations. Dalai Lama says, "If we exploit the environment in extreme ways, even though we may get some money or other benefits from it now, in the long run, we ourselves will suffer and future generations will suffer. When the environment will change, climatic conditions also change. When they change dramatically, the economy and many other things change as well. Even our physical health will be greatly affected. So this is not merely a moral question but also a question of our own survival. Therefore, in order to succeed in the protection and conservation of the natural environment, I think it is important first of all to bring about an internal balance within human beings themselves. The abuse of the environment, which has resulted in such harm to the human community, arose out of ignorance of the importance of the environment. I think it is essential to help people to understand this. We need to teach people that the environment has a direct bearing on our own benefit."¹⁵

Buddha says that in a man who is unmindful craving grows like a creeper. He runs from birth to birth, like a monkey seeking fruits in the forest¹⁶ Due to the craving for material things and the abundance of wealth, hearted worldly desires, one cannot be abandoned.

The acceleration of human craving attracted to physical things has continued to increase environmental pollution. 'One to two', 'Two to four', 'Four to eight' have turned the human glutton in the wrong direction. We have begun to compile the collection of material things. The economic progress of any country has started

15. Lama, Dalai. (1995). *My Tibet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 53.

16. Manujassa pamattacārino taṅha vaḍḍhati māluvā viya.

So phalavati hurāhuraṃ phalamicchāṃ va vanasmi vānaro. Dhammapada, 334.

to depend on its production and distribution. Not only this kind of development and pollution from it, not only the many species of ecological organisms and flora have been extinct, but many human breeds have also been eliminated. Jārbā tribe of Andaman from India is an example.

Individual and collective spiritual transformation is important to bring about major social change and to break with industrial society. We need inward transformation so that the interests of all species override the short-term self-interest of the individual, the family, the community, and the nation. To avoid “extremes”, or to follow the Middle Way in all matters, is seen as essential to Buddhist practice. Human being should concentrate on right livelihood. There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood: This is called right livelihood.¹⁷ Deep ecology and sustainable development supporters should be sympathetic to Buddhism. It can contribute to the humbling of human arrogance, necessary for fundamental ecological change.

5. CONCLUSION

On the basis of its ecological and sustainable approach, Buddhist are very generous, compassionate and believer of peace in the world. If minds of living beings are at peace, then the world will be at peace. *We can't have peace without development but development without peace will not be possible either.* We as Buddhist, this is our duty to share this great knowledge tradition with the rest of the world communities. In this regard, before sharing with others, we have to cultivate these value within ourselves the characteristics of sustainable development have to be displayed from our life and carrier. By cultivating Buddhist ethics and Principle one uplifts one's quality of life and enjoys wonderful happiness. The impact can be done on the lives of other as living examples, will not be possible to do by preaching or writings hundreds of books.¹⁸

17. Katamo ca, bhikkhave, sammāājīvo? Idha, bhikkhave, ariyasāvako micchāājīvaṃ pahāya sammāājīvena jīvaṃ kappeti, ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, sammāājīvo. Ibid, p. 234.

18. Gnanaratana, Nabirittankadawara. (2019). Contribution of Buddhist Studies and Humanities towards Sustainable Development. In: Nāgānanda 2nd International Research

Buddhist compassion and feelings of non-violence are accepted worldwide. Hatred is never destroyed hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is the eternal religion. There are those who do not realize that one day we all must die but those who do realize this settle their quarrels.¹⁹

Conclave on Buddhist Studies & Humanities. Kelaniya: Nāgānanda International Institute for Buddhist Studies, p. 32.

19. Na hi vērēna vērāni, sam'mantidha kudācanam. Avērēna ca sam'manti, ēsa dham'mō sanantanō. Parē ca na vijānanti, mayamēt'tha yamāmasē. Yē ca tat'tha vijānanti, tatō sam'manti mēdhagā. Dhammapada, 5-6.

Bibliography

- Bohm, David. (1980). *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. New York: Rutledge.
- Dhammananda, K. (1998). *The Dhammapada*, Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation.
- Einstein, Albert. (1930). Religion and Science. *New York Times Magazine*, New York, p. 1-4; reprint in Einstein's book (1949). *The World as I See It*, New York: Philosophical Library, pp. 24-28. Available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/aor/einstein/einsci.htm> (Accessed: 16 November 2018).
- Gnanaratana, Nabirittankadawara. (2019). Contribution of Buddhist Studies and Humanities towards Sustainable Development. In: *Nāgānanda 2nd International Research Conclave on Buddhist Studies & Humanities*. Kelaniya: Nāgānanda International Institute for Buddhist Studies, pp. 31-33
- Harvey, Peter. (2000). *An Introduction of Buddhist Ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 152
- <http://www.ecohustler.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Ego-2-Eco.jpg> (Accessed: 23 December 2018)
- Ireland, John D. (tr.). (2013). *Dhammika Sutta (Suttanipāta, 2.14)*. Available at: <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.2.14.irel.html>. (Accessed: 30 December 2018).
- Khisty, C. Jotin. "The Marriage of Buddhism and Deep Ecology." *Quest* 97. 2 (Spring 2009): 64-69. Available at: <https://www.theosophical.org/publications/quest-magazine/42-publications/quest-magazine/1670-the-marriage-of-buddhism-and-deep-ecology> (Accessed: 26 November 2018).
- Lama, Dalai. (1995). *My Tibet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: 'Our Common Future' (1987) Available at: <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf> (Accessed: 5 January 2019).

- Shastri, Dwarikadas (ed.) (2001). *Bodhicaryāvtāra of Śāntideva*. Varanasi: Bauddhabharati.
- Singh, Savindra. (1991). *Environmental Geography*. Allahabad: Prayag Pustak Bhawan.
- Singh, Vikas. (2018). Role of Buddhist Ethics in Society and Human Development. In: *5th International conference of IATBU*. Colombo: Ministry of Education and Higher Education Sri Lanka, pp. 20-33.

