

The Resonance of the Buddhist Teaching in the Modern Environmental Crisis

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Forests are delightful (to saints); where (ordinary) people find no delight there the passionless will find delight, for they don't seek sense pleasures.

Preliminary Remarks

The environmental crisis is an urgent topic today and is much discussed by environmentalists, researchers, economists, sociologists, scientists, politicians, philosophers, and others. Some of these environmental issues are global warming, hazardous waste disposal, ozone depletion, water pollution, over population and rain forest destruction. Industrialized countries like the countries of the third world are responding to the environmental crisis in different ways and many steps have been taken to deal with the issues. In this paper, I examine how the teachings of the Buddha can be applied to solve the environmental crisis.

Is the Environmental Crisis New?

Actually this problem has been examined over the past few decades as technology and science have advanced. People are seeking immediate solutions since human lives are endangered by environmental problems. Nonetheless, people who lived at least two thousand years ago also had to face these kinds of problems. In this context, I am going to examine some canonical texts. It is difficult to find a *Pāli* word with the same meaning as the English word 'environment'. The word *Bhūmi* has the closest meaning to it. The *Ariyapariyesana-sutta* cites the fact that the *Bodhisatta* has seen a fascinating plot *Ramanīyaṃ bhūmibhāgaṃ* which was environed by delightful forests, *Pāsādikaṃ ca vanasaṇḍam* and a flowing river which had very white sand.¹ Another dictionary meaning provides some synonyms such as: "...The earth, degree, state, the ground, etc." for the above mentioned *Pāli* word.² Another dictionary gives the meaning "*parikkhepa, parisara*" etc., for the aforesaid English term.³

The Buddha visited the kingdom of Magadha immediately after his enlightenment and was welcomed by king Bimbisāra, who lived in the city of Rājagaha.⁸ When a place of residence for the Buddha was asked for, the king mentioned a convenient place that was located close to the city, a location easy for people to gather in, with not many people about during the day time (*divā appākinṇam*), less noise at night (*rattiṃ appasaddam*), less sounds (*appanigghosam*) and freed from the congestion of breathing people (*viṇavātām*). Indeed, the above mentioned Pāli terms describe the environmental situation in the sixth century B.C. in ancient India. The terms revealed that the people who lived in the city of Rājagaha had to face problems such as hazardous waste, water pollution, over population, noise pollution, etc., in day-to-day life. It can be assumed that the city of Rājagaha had a large population by the time of the Buddha. It can be inferred that noise pollution was common in the city of Rājagaha as it occurred in other cities. The *Aṅguttara-nikāya* describes how a group of Brahmin householders were making a loud noise in the vicinity where the Buddha was living in the grove of Icchānaṅgala.⁹ In addition, the canonical texts record how some monks behaved like ordinary people during the life time of the Buddha and rejected the lifestyle of a recluse. According to the *Cātuma-sutta*, a group of monks were expelled by the Buddha even though they were the two prominent disciples, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, when they made a noise when sharing shelters one evening.¹⁰ Actually, the noise made by lay people or clergy is compared to the noise of fishermen at a fishing place since fishermen make a loud noise when fishing, and it has been mentioned as *kevaṭṭā maccaviḷlope viya*.⁷

This noise pollution should be easy to comprehend since the present population of India is the second largest in the world. While the aforementioned monastery came to be known as Veḷuvana, another well-known monastery is Jetavana. With reference to the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, it is evident that the millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika considered the above mentioned issues when he wanted to build the monastery of Jetavana.¹¹ Although, the population of the city of Rājagaha isn't mentioned in the canon, it does say that there were seventy million (70) people in the city of Sāvatti where the monastery was built by the above mentioned millionaire.¹² It isn't difficult to imagine the inconveniences faced by the people living in that kind of overcrowded environment. It is apparent that the above-mentioned population was

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only in the capital of the kingdom of Kosala. The populations of the outskirts of the city and the rest of the sixteen kingdoms are not mentioned.

It is worth noting that people were aware of peaceful places away from places that were polluted in numerous ways at that time. To confirm this, I would like to draw attention to an incident which has been mentioned in the *Majjhima-nikāya*.¹⁰ As mentioned in the *Dhammacetiya-sutta*, king Kosala the monarch of the Kosalan kingdom had paid a visit to a certain pleasure garden located at Nagaraka. As

consequence of actions performed over a prolonged period of time. The killing of animals and birds for consumption by human beings has gone on since the earliest times in human history. The sacrifice of animals was the cardinal religious act of the Brahmin tradition that took place on a grand scale at the time of the Buddha which he criticized. As mentioned in a certain *Sutta* once King Kosala organized a sacrifice with the intention of slaughtering five hundred bulls, cows, she-goats, goats and pigs.¹⁴ This kind of event took place very often and in many places during the life of the Buddha. Brahmanism was the chief religion during the time of the Buddha and it had a huge amount of followers. Anyway, we are unable to count how many animals and birds were killed for religious rites and rituals before the time of the Buddha, during his time and after.

In addition, there were many civilizations in several parts of the world contemporaneous with India of the Buddha's time although they are not mentioned in the canon. Thus, we have to accept the consequences of actions done by our ancestors, not only with regard to the killing of animals and birds but also the cutting down of trees and the destruction of grass which took place on a grand scale as is recorded in the *Kūṭadanta-sutta*.¹⁵ A large amount of firewood was needed to burn the slaughtered animals and for other such functions. A certain incident that took place in northern Nepal in November 2009 causes much sorrow among kindhearted people. According to some sources more than two hundred thousand animals were killed including cows, pigs, goats, etc. within two days in the same place. Undoubtedly, it isn't hard to understand what kind of effects will result from this devastation in the future for human beings in multifarious ways. Even in modern times people engage in such harmful and horrendous actions due to their ignorance and craving.

Global warming was predicted by the Buddha twenty-five centuries ago in canonical accounts though in a symbolic way. The discourse on seven suns or the *Sattasuriyoggamana-sutta* elaborates the present dangerous environmental crisis from a Buddhist point of view.¹⁶ At the very beginning of this *Sutta*, the destruction of major and minor plants (*bijagāmahūtagāma*) grass and huge trees (*osadhitināvanappatayo*) is mentioned as a consequence of a prolonged severe drought due to increased warming. Indeed, that period can refer to the present time as a considerable period of time, of twenty five centuries, has elapsed since that

utterance of the Buddha. It is noteworthy that scientists have newly discovered that there will be a severe famine in 2100 due to severe droughts. The aforementioned discourse states that a second sun will arise which will dry up the little rills (*kunnadiyo*) and little streams (*kusobbhā*). The third sun will cause to dry up big rivers such as the Ganges, Yamunā, Aciravati, Sarabhu, etc. Not only that but great lakes such as Anotatta, Sihapapāta, Rathakārā, Kaṇṇamuṇḍa, Kunāla, Chaddantā, Mandākiṇi, etc. will become dry when the forth sun arises. Furthermore, it predicts that the water level of the great ocean will drop gradually to ankle level of an ordinary person (*gopphakamuttam*) even though the present level is two *Yojanas* according to the *sutta* source, and this is as a consequence of the fifth sun. It is compared with water in a foot print of a cow. In addition, the same source cites this earth will begin to smoke when the sixth sun has arisen. The whole earth will begin to blaze as the consequence of the seventh sun. One can argue as to how there arise seven suns on this earth. Everybody knows that it can't happen, but the Buddha has informed us of global warming in the future. Actually, it is confirmed by what little bit of warming we are experiencing now as the result of the past which was explained through the doctrine of the Buddha. He emphasized that the nature of this earth is based on dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and the three characteristics of existence, those known as impermanence (*anicca*) suffering (*dukkha*) and no self (*anatta*).

Five kinds of business enterprises discouraged by the Buddha: The selling of meat (*mamsa*), fish (*maccha*), animals (*satta*), weapons (*sattha*) and liquor (*majja*).¹⁷ Now, it is known that the killing of animals and fish is one reason for global warming. Weapons can also be a problem. During the last few decades man has produced many types of weapons such as nuclear, atomic and other harmful ones which focus on the destruction of human beings. The Second World War is the best example of the effects of using dangerous and harmful weapons. Atomic bombs were dropped by American airmen on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Furthermore it is reported that babies are born with defects at birth resulting from the after effects of those atomic bomb explosions. In addition, American soldiers used many kinds of poisons to destroy thick jungles during the war between America and Vietnam. Like the Japanese people the Vietnamese also still experience birth defects.

In addition, Sri Lanka has also used weapons in the war that dragged on for twenty-five years between Tamil terrorists and governmental forces. Even if the government forces followed international law, it seems the Tamil terrorists didn't care much about following it. In the last months of the war, terrorists had been digging many artificial channels or moats to supply water to protect their defensive areas. In doing so, they destroyed many lakes and other natural resources. Furthermore, they had laid an uncountable amount of land mines and other harmful bombs in that area and no one can measure what kind of harm will occur to the environment as a result. The consequences of the prolonged wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, African countries etc., will result in an unprecedented aftermath in the future and only human beings can be blamed for that.

Further, it has come to light that many weapons that can be used in and under water are being tested at present by the developed countries with the assistance of advanced technology and science and that many submarines equipped with such weapons have been launched. These weapons are very rarely used for the benefit of human beings, but rather, for their destruction. Apparently, such actions pollute the water in a considerable way.

Deforestation should be considered as another urgent environmental problem in modern times and responsible people are seeking an immediate remedy for it. No one can say how many hectares are being lost every day, since deforestation happens illegally on a large scale in every country. It seems this also had been a problem during the time of our ancestors. As mentioned in the birth story of *Alīnacitta*, there had been a village of carpenters adjacent to a certain forest where five hundred carpenters lived while pursuing their livelihood.¹⁸ Obviously, there must have been a factory there producing many kinds of furniture and other wooden articles for the use of the people. Furthermore the birth story mentions that the wood for the furniture was brought by those carpenters from the forest located adjacent to their village. However, no mention has been made as to the policy that was followed with regard to agricultural activities such as making paddy fields and *Chenas* for the purpose of cultivation. Once the Buddha said not to cut the forest.¹⁹ Generally, the Pāli term *vana* is used to convey the meaning of forest but in this context the term means craving. I am not attempting to modify the meaning etymologically but the stanza mentioned is significant in this context. The Buddha

used many similes and parables to make a statement explicit. Even in the statement concerned, the simile used is an external object the meaning of which is all too clear and visible to the mind's eye. The stanza emphasizes not to cut the forest and I suppose the destruction of the forests hadn't been as extensive in ancient Indian society compared to the present situation. At the very beginning of this paper the translation of a well known stanza from the *Dhammapada* was quoted by me. Indeed, that stanza examines the cardinal reason for the destruction of forests everywhere and the reason is insatiable desire or craving. The looks general population at the economic value of the forest though recluses oppose this concept.

Aerial pollution is another type of environmental problem that is facing the world today and faced by our ancestors in ancient society. In brief, airplanes, satellites, space satellites, smoke from factories, etc.²⁰ are recognized as the reasons for modern aerial pollution. Even though such kinds of reasons didn't exist in ancient times there are some fragmentary references which give information in canonical texts in this regard. As mentioned in the commentary of the *Anguttara-nikāya* smoke was added to the air from the kilns used by the ancient people to burn tiles, bricks, etc. Canonical and commentarial works confirm that the ancient people built many types of buildings with bricks, and, tiles were used for roofs. While the tiles were used to cover roofs, bricks were used to build walls, ramparts, moats, etc. by our ancestors. Some stories say how certain carpenters used bricks for the above mentioned constructions.²¹ Furthermore, the commentary on the *Dhammapada* refers to how a potter set fire to his hearth and the pottery was collected.²² Actually, it can be assumed that this kind of grand scale brick manufactories could cause considerable air pollution in ancient times. As depicted in a commentary a certain slaughterer of pigs had fed the pigs in a big pig next to his home located close to the great monastery of Jetavana.²³ It is clear that, his way of living polluted the environment in many ways since he continued this practice at least for fifty five years. Besides these few instances the canonical texts provide ample evidence of environmental pollution but there isn't room here to cite all of them.

The Application of the Buddha's Teaching to the Environmental Crisis

The core of the Buddhist teaching can refer to dependent origination or the relation between cause and effect which means people have to experience the good or bad

consequences of their behavior. When the environmental problem is analyzed through dependent origination we can cite as the cause certain unwise actions performed by both our predecessors as well as people in the present generation which have resulted in the existing environmental crisis. It must be noted here that the authentic teaching of the Buddha, expounded twenty five centuries ago is extremely concerned with modern subjects such as politics, sociology, philosophy, psychology and other scientific subjects. Hence, I would like to examine in what way the teachings of the Buddha can contribute to solving the environmental problems in modern times.

The Responsibility of the Government

In fact, the governments in every country have a considerable responsibility in solving environmental problems at all times. On this matter the governments can promulgate or enact proliferous new rules if the approved rules aren't sufficiently effective. Not only that, making an alert about environmental problems and providing a real understanding among the people regarding them are necessary. It seems that a similar idea is contained in some discourses of the Buddha. The fifth *Sutta* in the *Dīgha-nikāya*, the *Kūṭadanta-Sutta* was preached to a Brahmin of that name and this *Sutta* narrates how a certain king, Vijita, organized a great sacrifice when his country was seriously affected by a financial crisis.²⁴ As depicted there it was decided to collect a vast amount of animals, birds, firewood and grass for this sacrifice. However, those almost doomed animals and birds and the firewood and grass were saved from destruction due to the advice of the wise chaplain. This discourse states explicitly that the king does not possess the right to act according to his own whims and fancies with regard to the environment except to protect it.

Buddhism recognizes greediness as the main cause from which all kinds of environmental problems arise. The *Cakkavatti-sutta* provides ample examples to support this fact.²⁵ As demonstrated there many environmental problems have evolved due to craving and greediness. The same *Sutta* states that even a whole society living in peace and harmony together can be rent asunder by the eruption of greed and craving. Sometimes kings who lived in ancient time have ignored and neglected their duties towards the community. This *Sutta* very clearly prescribes what are the right actions that should be performed by kings regarding protection of

the environment. First and foremost, rulers should be righteous. That means they should have enough knowledge of governing the country. Not only that, he should respect and honour whatever religion he is following though without denigrating religions followed by others. As mentioned in the same *Sutta*, protecting any kind of human being, poor or wealthy, those living in the town or village in the same country is the duty of the ruler. This *Sutta* ensures that the ruler treat with equality the various castes in society such as Kshatriya, Brahmins, etc. and the discrimination of them as *aḍḍa*, *dalidda*, etc. It assures that when the rulers provide sufficient facilities and guidance for the community it results in the protection of the environment.

Besides the above facts, it is interesting to note what the *Sutta* elicits as an advanced policy with regard to the preservation of the natural environment. Actually, this *Sutta* provides an interesting compound word in *migapakkhīsu*. While the Pāli term 'miga' gives the meaning of quadrupeds, *pakkhī* gives the meaning of birds. That means the rulers can't slaughter animals and birds but their bounden duty should be to protect them and promote their welfare at all times. On the other hand, it can be imagined that protecting wildlife means the protection of the environment. It is praiseworthy that some Western countries such as Australia, America, England etc. already have opened up hospitals for the preservation of animals and birds and animals clinics to promote their welfare. According to some Sri Lankan sources there was an ancient king who ruled over the Sri Lankan island known as Amaṇḍagāmiṇī who had promulgated a law prohibiting the killing of animals and birds in sanctuaries located next to some temple premises. Emperor Asoka had made the same proclamation before king Amaṇḍagāmiṇī besides encouraging the cultivation of pleasure gardens, forests, building bridges and digging wells.

The group of discourses concerned with deities in the *Devatā-saṃyutta* in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* examines how human beings can contribute to the protection of the environment by initiating certain activities.²⁶ As stated there, laying out gardens and engendering forests can be regarded as praiseworthy actions in terms of the Buddhist philosophy. This *Sutta* mentions two Pāli terms, *ārāma* and *vana* to denote gardens and forests. In addition, with reference to the commentary *ārāma* can be defined as pleasure gardens in modern phraseology where fruits and flowers²⁷ are grown. It is evident that the pleasure gardens in the time of the Buddha

such as Veluvana, Jetavana, Jivakāmbavana, etc., referred to with the aforementioned Pāli term were those located in the vicinity of main cities where people went to enjoy the environment and their leisure.

On the other hand, according to the same source the Pāli term *vana* offers the meaning of forest whether grown naturally or artificially. It states how to grow forests more and more. One can develop the vegetation next to the forest which has grown naturally. Buddhist philosophy encourages reforestation which is mentioned as a meritorious act that increases its merit day and night because it conduces to the happiness of the individual and others. An ant commences its long journey with a single step; anyhow it is able to fulfill its aim. In the same way anyone can commence to cultivate a thick jungle with a single plant and later on he can receive the benefit of it. Contrariwise, destroying a single tree in a forest causes deforestation in due course. Hence, we have to contradistinguish the good way from the bad way since our actions contribute to the growing of a thick jungle or the destruction of a thick jungle.

The Responsibility of the Individual

Just as much as the government has a considerable responsibility in protecting the forest the individual also has a responsibility to do the same as pointed out by the teachings of the Buddha. We always point a finger at others when they are remiss in fulfilling responsibilities while forgetting our own duties and responsibilities. According to Buddhism it is better to do our duty rather than criticize others. Hence I would like to examine some points as to how the individual can contribute to reducing the environmental crisis from the Buddhist point of view.

The five precepts that have been prescribed by the Buddha bring into being an ethical behavior on which an excellent society can be built. In this short space I will not endeavour to examine all five precepts except the first. This precept is concerned with abstaining from killing any sentient being since every being has a right to live until the last breath. If any one kills any being it is recognized as an unethical practice by the standards of any sophisticated society. Killing may be on a small scale or grand scale but the consequences of the act would be inevitable. Hence, if individuals can refrain from killing it will conduce to building a refined

society and maintain a balance in the environment. It was discussed earlier in this paper, how killing of animals contributes to an environmental crisis.

The Loving Kindness *Sutta* or the *Metta-sutta* explains several kinds of beings that live in this universe.²⁸ They are the long (*dīgha*), the big (*mahanta*), the middle size (*majjhima*), the short (*rassa*), the small (*anuka*), the fat (*thūla*), the visible (*diṭṭha*), the invisible (*addiṭṭha*), beings who live far (*dūra*), and those who live near (*avidūra*) and any kind of being (*bhūta*) and those seeking of a womb (*sambhavesī*). It is seen here that all living beings in this universe are contained in these categories. There is another word to denote all living beings which is mentioned as 'pāṇa'.²⁹ Pūraṇakassapa who was a contemporary religious leader of the Buddha's time proclaimed that if any one kills even all beings living in this world, he doesn't commit a sinful action and he will not inherit the bad effect of it. However, though his teaching is inapplicable in this case, the usage of the word is noteworthy in this context. It seems that he did not have a broad definition of this word like what Buddhism has in this case. The general meaning of the Sanskrit word 'prāṇa' is vitality.³⁰ We can infer that since all living beings exist on vitality or breath, this word was used to convey the same meaning. However, in the Buddhist canon this word has been used to include all beings in this universe not only in this world. The first precept among the five precepts is the abstaining from the killing of what ever being. The word that the Buddha used is *prāṇaṃ* which means any kind of being, imbued with vitality such as a human, animal or bird etc. Now we face a contradiction here. How do we kill gods if this word means all beings in this universe. But the answer is implicit that we can't approach those divine realms since their heavenly existence has been determined by actions done by them in their previous lives. The Upanishads holds a view that the sin in killing increases or decreases according to the size of the being. As an example, if one kills an elephant he accumulates a large amount of sin since the body of the elephant is big and the opposite occurs in the case of an ant because of its size. Furthermore, it elaborates that the elephant has done a large amount of merit to become what it is and the ant has done a less amount of merit. The commentary presents this idea which can be compared with those of the Upaniṣadic view.³¹ Then in that case the sin of killing goes up and down according to the size of the being that is killed. If one kills an ant and an elephant he accumulates more sin from killing the elephants because of its

size. Evidently, the Buddhist meaning goes deeper than the Jain, or rather, so it seems. According to the classification every action is volitional. At the killing of an ant one exerts less volition than in killing an elephant. If the being is virtuous the killer accumulates more sin according to Buddhist teachings.

There is an interesting incident in the *Vinaya-piṭaka* which is concerned with the above discussion. According to the accounts of the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, the Buddha spent his twelfth rainy retreat at *Verañjā*, a certain place in ancient India, with five hundred monks including Sāriputta, Moggallāna, Ānanda and other foremost ones. At that time there had been a severe famine at *Verañjā* and the Buddha and his disciples also faced this situation. Five hundred horse merchants, who came from *Dakkhiṇāpatha*, allowed each monk a bowl of grain per day. During this severe drought, Moggallāna approached the Buddha and asked permission to turn over the soil in the vicinity of that area with his miraculous power, to bring up the essential soil upwards.³² Even though, this appears to be an extremist view, the Buddha asked Moggallāna, what happens to those beings who live under the surface of the soil? Then Moggallāna replied I am able to create a hand into which all those beings can be put. In fact, the beings that live under the soil are worms that contain one faculty according to Jainism. Even though, they are of less value when compared with other animals, Buddhism has protected the rights even of microcosms in the world. One scholar observe that : "There are only about 4400 species of mammals, while there may be as many as 30,000,000 species of insects."³³

However, it is evident that humans who always endeavour to protect animal rights, advocate mostly the protection of some forms of life like elephants, horses, monkeys, and a few kinds of birds, though very rarely endangered species and insects. It is evident that Buddhism advocates all the above mentioned species of insects and all species of mammals. The above mentioned incident that happened in the village of *Verañjā* is the best example in this context. In order to alter the behavior of some monks, the Buddha had to prescribe a disciplinary rule. When the Buddha resided at *Ālaviya*, the monks dug the ground to build a monastery. The people who saw the incident complained to the Buddha about this. The majority thought macrocosms held only one faculty (*ekīndriya*). Then he prescribed that if

any monk digs or causes to dig the ground, he falls into the offence of a 'pācittiya'.³⁴ This isn't such a serious fault but the injunction helps to protect the rights of all beings.

There isn't any argument or debate about the greatness of the Buddha as a religious teacher who emerged in human history and he always advised others to follow the right way since he understood it before anyone else. Accordingly, historical evidence explicitly points to the fact that his birth, enlightenment and great passing away occurred under trees in open places which draws attention to the interrelationship between Buddhism and the environment. In this context, I would like to examine in what way the Buddha held up the environment to be an example for others. At the beginning of this topic it was discussed how wasting things could be a reason for causing an imbalance in nature. The Buddha has shown us through excellent examples how we should act with regard to the environment. As mentioned in the discourse *Dhammadāyāda*, the Buddha cast away the remainder of his food on the ground where there wasn't any grass (*appaharite*) and in the water where there weren't any kind of sentient beings (*apāṇake*).³⁵ This is because certain ingredients in cooked food such as oil, seasoning, etc., occasionally cause harm to the environment. There are a few places where mention is made of this practice followed by the Buddha. It is needless to present further quotations as examples to explain the interrelationship between the Buddha and the environment but I would like to examine one more interesting incident for the purpose of conveying a better understanding of the subject. As shown in the *Brahmāyu-sutta*, the disciple of the Brahmin Brahmāyu, known as Uttara, had followed the Buddha for a period of at least six months because he wanted to examine proof of the Buddha's Buddhahood.³⁶ He observed every action of the Buddha in his daily routine which has been mentioned and here I want to quote one interesting incident relevant to this context. As revealed in the same source the Buddha economized the use of water receiving neither too little nor too much water to wash the alms bowl and when he washed the bowl before and after meals his hand and the bowl were both washed at the same time. Not only that, the interesting thing is he never threw away the waste water immediately into the same place but splashed it about. Indeed, this action of the Buddha is a very trivial one, but it demonstrates how we should act with regard to the environment. In fact, it can be assumed that there wasn't in the past, isn't in the

present and will not be in the future any religious teacher in human history who acted in such a considerate way towards the environment like the Buddha. Every Buddhist knows that the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away took place under a tree or in the natural environment and during his forty five years' mission he spent most of his time under trees or in the forests more than the time he spent in monasteries such as Veluvana, Jetavana, etc. Besides these facts, he took many examples and similes from the natural environment to illustrate his sublime doctrine to his followers and he always applauded right actions performed towards the environment by his disciples.

The discourse on *Sundarika* or *Sundarika-sutta* examines how the Buddha advised heretics to maintain nature's balance and how they followed his unaggressive advice obediently.³⁷ The very beginning of this *Sutta* refers to how a certain Brahmin who was known as *Sundarika* offered some kind of oblation to the god of fire and after that how he intended to offer the rest of the oblation to a suitable recluse or ascetic. When he saw the Buddha he became very angry but calmed down on hearing the advice of the Buddha. Later on he was eager to offer the rest of the oblation to the Buddha but he was advised to put it in a place where there wasn't grass (*appaharita*) and where there weren't any sentient beings (*apāṇake*) as mentioned above. It seems that the content of the oblation in this context was milk rice or *pāyāsa* in *Pāli*. Anyhow, the commentary states that milk rice can be put under grass that has grown to a level higher than the neck of an average person. That means there isn't any harm throwing away the contents of milk rice under tall grass for they have grown enough.

In addition, the same commentary states that the Buddha wanted to give an example of how to observe the precept that was laid down by him against the destruction of any kind of plant. It has been mentioned especially in the chapter on morality or *Sīlakkhandha-vagga* in the *Dīgha-nikāya* that generally people believed that the Buddha and his disciples abstained from the destruction of any seed or plant.³⁸ Actually, this explains how the Buddhist tradition contributed to preserving nature's balance. Further, the Buddha advised the Brahmin in the imperative mood, the word used being, *opilāpehi*, to place aside the milk rice with the bowl because if food like milk rice is put immediately into little rills and streams etc., it will harm sentient beings. The commentary emphasizes putting a large quantity of food into

the great ocean does not minimize the mindlessness of the act just because of the huge amount of water in the ocean.³⁸

In addition, the *Sutta* refers to the fact that the milk rice had made a sound while it was spilt into the water by the Brahmin. The simile of a plough that had got heated up during the day which when put into water made a similar noise was brought up to illustrate the same effect made by milk rice when put into water. In fact, the most interesting thing in this context is how some kinds of food cause harm to the environment. The same kind of narrative appears in a few places in the canon and the incident concerning the Brahmin Kasibhāradvāja is the most interesting one. With reference to the incidents mentioned above, everyone can realize what a vital role the Buddhist teaching has played in preserving a balanced environment. One birth story illustrates what is the correct way a human being should act towards the environment because of the interrelated nature of the environment.⁴⁰ As stated there the person who acts in an ethical way does not destroy even the branch of a tree which provides shelter for him even for a while. In fact, it is needless to explain in detail the benefit that accrues both to the individual and society by this kind of ethical teaching from the Buddhist perspective through excellent examples how we should act with regard to the environment.

The Role of the Monks

It is interesting to examine how the Buddha advised his disciples thoroughly to keep the physical and mental environment in balance. Many requisites are needed for the preservation of human beings but Buddhist monks are restricted to four, robes (*cīvara*), food (*piṇḍapāta*), lodgings (*senāsana*), and medicine (*bhesajjha*). Nevertheless, monks are not allowed to collect them on a grand scale. Nothing can be preserved forever with reference to the teaching of the Buddha and one day we have to put them away. In this context, I would like to examine how the teaching of the Buddha contributes to protect the environment since in the beginning it was discussed that the things thrown out cause another environmental crisis.

With reference to the *Vinaya-piṭaka* Ānanda, the chief attendant of the Buddha had gone to the city of Kosambi in order to impose the highest penalty (*brahmadanḍa*) on the Buddhist monk who was known as Channa immediately after the first council.⁴¹ When he was sitting in the garden of king Udena, five hundred robes were

offered by the queens of king Udena since they delighted in Venerable Ānanda's discourses. The king who heard this news was angry and Ānanda was questioned by him with regard to this fact. Actually this conversation explains the thrifty economic use of robes by the monks in the following order: the newly received robes should be distributed among the monks who have faded and torn robes. Then the faded and torn robes are used to make coverlets, then coverlets to make pillowcases and mattress covers, then the old pillowcases and mattress covers are used to make rugs, then the old rugs to make dusters, then the old dusters to remove the water and lastly the old dusters are torn into pieces and kneaded with clay and then used to repair the cracked floors and walls of the monastery. It is obvious that nothing usable is wasted. Not only in the use of robes but monks had to follow prescribed methods with regards to other requisites also. Actually, this can be mentioned as a most practical method by which nothing is wasted whether by monks or the laity.

At present we waste things without any sense of the environment but the Buddha's teaching gives a practical answer with regard to conservation to contemporary society.

Jainism which was an important religion contemporary with the Buddha emphasized the reality of the world as based on six principal elements.⁴² As the definition of Jainism, goes the tree should be recognized as a living being that contains one faculty. According to Jainism, animals are the beings that have four faculties. Furthermore, as to both Buddhism and Jainism human beings are complete in that they have five faculties. But the Buddha hasn't classified all beings into groups like Jainism. Though, some time he has approved the notion of majority for the welfare of all. The *Vinaya-piṭaka* provides enough evidences that deal with this context.⁴³ When a certain monk wanted to build a temple, he ordered the people to cut down a tree that was honored and respected by the society. When the story was related to the Buddha he denied the monk permission saying the people have a feeling that there is a living being in the tree (*Manussā jīvasaññino rukkhasmiṃ*).

Another incident can be seen in the same *Piṭaka* that is connected with nuns: at the very beginning of the order of nuns, the nuns walked the alms round

during the rainy season likewise in the other seasons since there were no rules prescribed by the Buddha in this regard.⁴⁴ When people saw this action they were indignant because they were influenced by Jainism. Then, the Buddha had to lay down a disciplinary rule according to the convention of the majority. In another case, the Buddha enacted a rule not to destroy any kind of tree or plant due to an action done by a certain monk who lived in the city of Ālavaka.⁴⁵ Indeed, the Buddhist disciples are unable to harm any plant that grows from the root *mūlabīja* (*orris vacā, muricatum, usīram*), trunk (*khandha*), Bo-tree (*Assattho*), banyan (*nigrodha*), flower (*Puppha*), fruits (*phala*), sugar cane (*uccu*), bamboo (*velu*), sprout (*agga*) and seed (*bīja*), paddy (*vīhi*), bean (*māsaka*).

Furthermore the Buddha has advised the monks not to urinate (*passāvaṃ*) release excrement (*uccāraṃ*) and spit (*kheḷaṃ*) in places where there is vegetation since it causes its destruction.⁴⁶ But the rules have been relaxed for monks who are ill. Also the Buddhist monks have been prohibited not to do the above mentioned actions in the water according to the same source.

The difference between ordinary people and Buddhist mendicant was pointed out at the very beginning in this paper. Here I would like to emphasise how Buddhist disciples contribute to preserve the balance of the environment.

In general, Buddhist monks, especially, those who achieved liberation have used pleasure gardens, forests, sanctuaries and thick jungles to experience the taste of freedom. The greenish forests and mountains, rivers, rills, streams etc., have caused supra-sensual joy in their minds and no harm has been done to the environment by those monks. Furthermore, Buddhist monks have preserved that supramundane joy whether they lived in the thick forests or in the cities. As cited in the *Samaññaphala-sutta*, once *Ajātasatthu* was accompanied by the royal doctor *Jīvaka* to the presence of the Buddha while he was living with five hundred disciples in the mango grove of *Jīvaka*. At that time, he had experienced trembling and fear due to the stillness that was observed by those five hundred Buddhist disciples.⁴⁷ As depicted in the same source there hadn't been at least a noise of a monk clearing the throat. It means that the king had expected a loud noise from such a large assembly of monks since even a few people are enough to make a loud noise. Loud noise or speaking loudly is

mentioned as *uccāsadda* and *mahāsadda* in the Buddhist canon.⁴⁸ Buddhism emphasizes moderation in speech as conducive to both physical and mental development of the human being.

Buddhist monks have even dwelt with dangerous and fierce animals such as tigers, lions, leopards, bear with extreme harmony. Albeit, it is interesting to mention here what happens to the natural environment if the general run-of-the mill people lived there since their craving for more and more from the environment would cause devastation. Once a scholar said the natural environment is enough for the necessities of mankind but it is not sufficient to satisfy the desire or craving in them. Actually this statement can be mentioned as a very significant statement that has great relevance to present times and echoes the Buddha's teaching. Even in modern times, Buddhist monks and nuns contribute much to preserving the environment.

Nonetheless, it is sad to say that today a great danger threatens the environment because some people haven't a clue as to how they should act with regard to the environment. Once, the Buddha expounded that all dangers, harm arise from not understanding or from uneducated persons. Actually in this context the wise aren't recognized by their titles, but by their right understanding and ethical behaviour according to the teachings of the Buddha. That is why the Buddha always advised his disciples to develop and cultivate wisdom in the right way. The Buddha emphasized the reality of the world through dependant origination and three characteristics of existence that mark reality. We may not be able to prevent the destruction of the world in the future, but, the most interesting thing is if we can follow the afore-mentioned practical ways to maintain nature's balance, we can prevent destruction at least for some time but not forever.

Conclusion

The natural environment was reverently honored and respected by our ancestors in the prehistoric period or it was regarded as god and the *RgVeda* provides ample evidences to confirm this notion. Thus, when the science and technology began to reveal the physical reality of nature scientific terms gradually honour and faith in the environment were lost and new ideas came out instead of theistic ideas. With the

advent of the industrial revolution in recent centuries humankind has become most materialistic in his attitudes and values. None restrained with regard to satisfying sensual pleasures and acquisition of wealth is not practiced by modern day human beings. Sense faculties have begun to dominate them making human beings slaves to insatiable passion. This mental state is recognized as greed or '*taphā*' in Buddhist tradition which causes to hinder both mental and physical progress of the human being. Obviously, the continued greed for more and more possessions has engendered a violent and aggressive attitude towards the environment from the Buddhist point of view. Hence, the exploitation of the environment continues because man always forgets he is part of the environment.

In fact, Buddhism explicitly points out a lifestyle of moderation as best or of utmost satisfaction with basic human necessities or in other words the way how to reduce greed. Every being has to govern his animal instincts by self-control in the enjoyment of the sense and conduct himself with wisdom and self-awareness in all activities. The teachings of the Buddha points out the best way to keep nature's balance.

All *Pāli* texts referred to are editions of the *Pāli* Text Society, London.

Abbreviations

A	<i>Anguttara-nikāya</i>
D	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Dhp-a	<i>Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā</i>
J-a	<i>Jatakatṭhakathā</i>
Kn	<i>Khuddaka-nikāya</i>
M	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>
Sp	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i>
Sn	<i>Suttanipāta</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya Piṭaka</i>