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## BUDDHIST CULTURE: AN OVERVIEW ON ENVIRONMENT

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### Abstract:

We are in 21th century, in a developing way but in other hand we also in a devastating condition. Our environmentalists concern about the future environmental hazards is going to happen the selfish anthropocentric activities of man. Man has the supreme power to protect and preserve the nature, where he is the main victim of such condition. Modern culture with all knowledge of advanced scientific technology is found to be indifferent about non-humans and nature. Whereas in Buddhists culture have shown their concern for non-humans and nature long back. It is seen that in the framework of Buddhist culture, the gap between human and non-human has been minimized. Buddhist cuisine, Buddhist architecture, Buddhist music, believe and behavior of monks and common people at that time and also Theravāda Buddhism, Buddhaghosa, boddhisattā, mahāyāna Buddhism and Buddhist ethical theories like pratityasamudpāda, brahmavihāra, universal love, karunā, Muditā, Upekkha, anātmam, ahimsa, theory of karma are very much concern about environmental ethics. In this paper we are going to analyses how Buddhist culture and their life style are positive towards the nature.

It shows that many scholar on Buddhist philosophy (Buddhist philosophy refers to the philosophical investigations and systems of inquiry that developed by various Buddhist schools) have claimed that Buddhists culture (Buddhist culture is explained through Buddhist cuisine, Buddhist architecture, Buddhist music, believe and behavior of monks and common people at that time) were concern with environmental ethics. On the hand, some other scholars claim that Buddhists were not concerned with the environmental issues. However it cannot be denied that in the framework of Buddhists philosophy there has been some concept to support

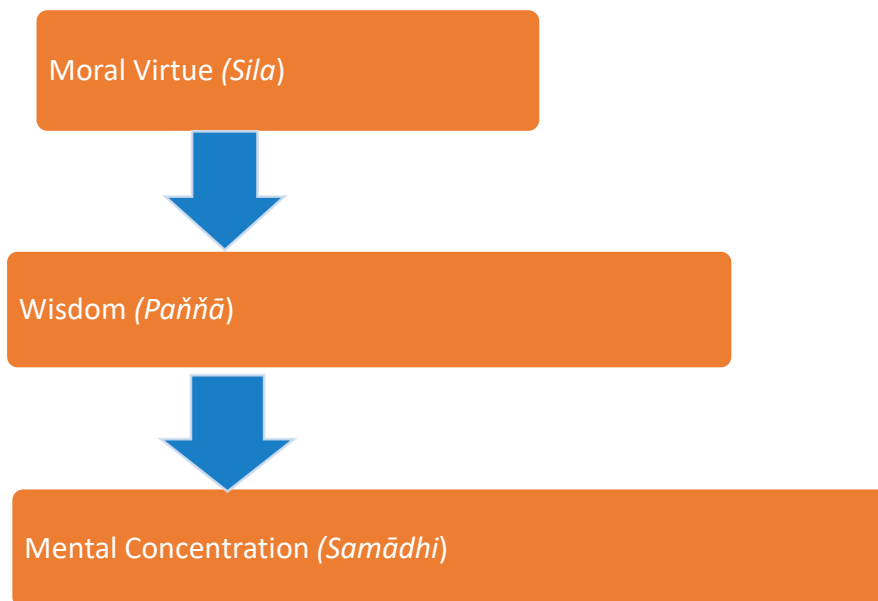
the stand of the environmental ethics. It might not be case that they were advocating any theory of environmental theory. But it can very well be presumed that their concern about environment can be fitted into the recent understanding about environmental theories. Buddhist culture acknowledge the non-anthropocentric theory of environmental ethics.

It is believed that there has been no systematic presentation of environmental ethics in the Buddhist culture. But if there is deeply survey the Buddhist literature shows, a deep relation between man and nature. A relation of dependence is portrayed between animals and human beings in this culture. Buddhism has several spiritual and ethical teachings that can be easily support an environmental ethics (Gross, 1997, P.336).

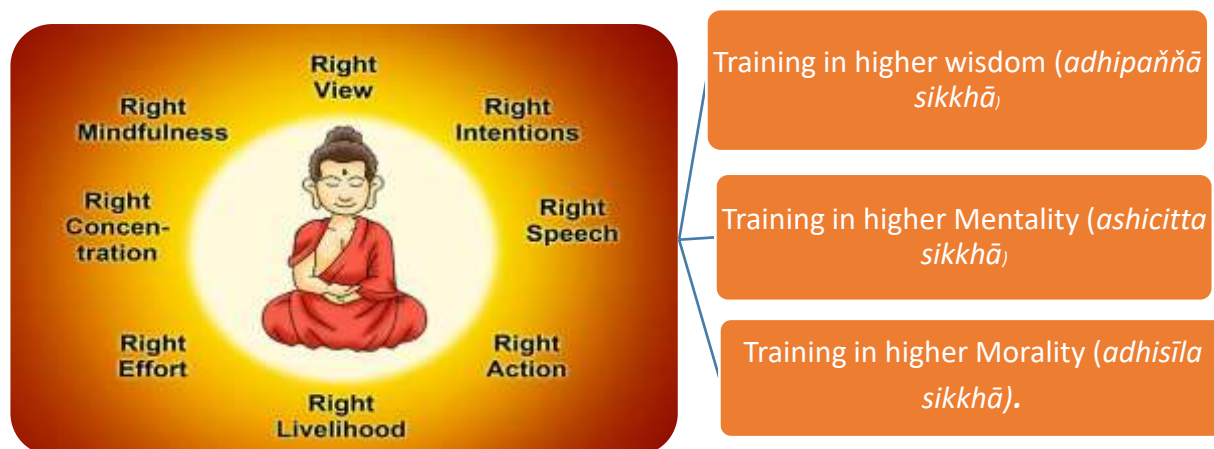


For the Buddhist tradition in general, action is grounded in disposition (*cetanā*) (Swearer, 1998, p.76). The concept that the “good tree bears good fruit” applies to conventional acts of goodness as well as to the superogatory or extra-ordinary acts associated with heroic behavior and with religious virtue (Swearer, 1998, p. 76). For example, the often cited five precepts of Theravāda Buddhism (*pañca sīla*) are constructed as training rules (*sikkhāpadam*) i.e., stealing, sexual misconduct, prevention against taking life, lying, and intoxicants not only function as rules or action guides but also as steps towards self-realization and attainment of the highest good, that is, nirvana (Swearer, 1998, p.76). Theravāda Buddhism also gives importance to moral rules, virtue, well-being, fairness and justice. Theravāda Ethics is *sīla*, variously translated as moral practice, good character, and moral code.

In Buddhist culture is reflect in the different schools of Buddhism. And these schools are very much focused in moral activity of human beings. And now by taking moral activity is the way for solving the environmental problem. If human being go for to solving the environmental problem, first have the idea of oneness. Which can be possible by moral teachings. There is any idea of differentiation between human beings and the other it causes selfishness attitude with in us. Hence, if human being take ethical teachings of Buddhist culture for environmental problems is it more positive to solve. Buddhaghosa gives three branches of path of purification like,



The Theravāda Buddhism also categories the noble eight-fold path like training in higher wisdom (*adhipaññā sikkhā*), training in higher mentality (*ashicitta sikkhā*), training in higher morality (*adhisīla sikkhā*).

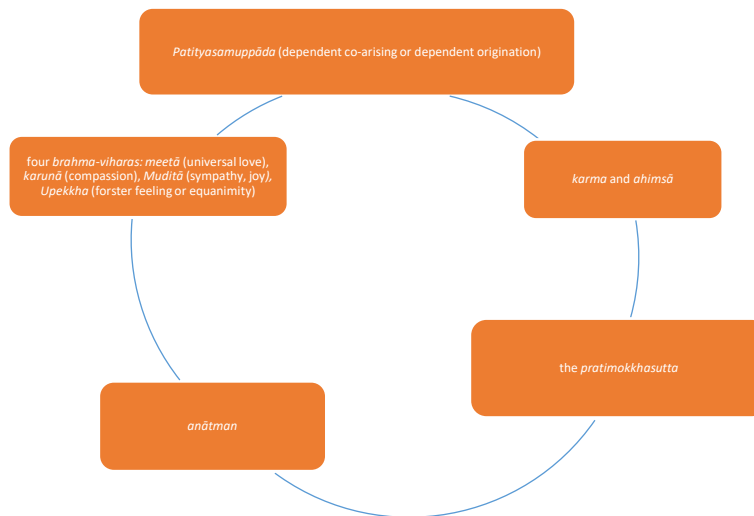


For Theravāda culture and Buddhaghosa these three training and the three branches are the path of leading to nirbbāna, which is the highest state of life. Though these three are talks about human nature and behavior, it is also helpful if we take this path of purification in order to solve ecological difficulties. For the solving of environmental problem moral teachings are needed. If our behaviors and characters guided by moral teachings then only we can solve ethical problem easily. Environmental problem now a days becomes an ethical problem. That's why if we give important to individual's ethical concern then we can able to solve the

environmental issues. Because environmental problem occurs due to lack of ethical concern in individual activities. Eco-apologists discover in the personal illustration of the Buddha, Buddhists monks and Buddhist culture as an exemplary of environmentally sensitive manners (Swearer, 1998, p.126). There is a line by Stephanie Kaza which fits that Buddhist culture supports ecological principle, “The inspiration of the bodhisattva and of the Buddha ... are cooperative to me in examining the spiritual aspect of the environmental crises” (Swearer, 2006, p.126). Mahayana Buddhist philosophy develop around the theme of inter-dependence, mutual relationship and the ultimate identity of all beings in the Buddha-nature (Bloom, 1972, p.120). The main principle was summarized in Avatamsaka Sutra in the phrase: All is one; one is all (Bloom, 1972, p.120). The phrase indicates there is no difference between the environment and human beings. Everything in this ecosphere connected with a single thread. Whether it is human beings or nature both are inter-connected like a chain. There is an example like, earth is compare with a ‘Huge Ship’. And if one part of the ship is damaged it would spread in whole ship and the ship would be ruined in the sea. Hence we should focuses on idea of oneness, which is already practice in Buddhist culture. In Buddhist culture it is found that peace is mostly focused by the Buddhist monks. They tries to give importance how to create in the society. And the word peace can be only fulfill by the action of Ahimsā, which is the main ethical teaching in Buddhist culture. At that time Buddhist monks are using piece of cloth in their mouth and noses. By the thinking of open mouth and noses it may be causes harm to sentient beings. And they also did not use light in the night by the fear of falling down of sentient being in the light. The ecological disorder might be breaks the peace in the world. That’s why Buddhist culture always talks about the peace and the non-violence is the way to lead a happy life style. The Buddhist culture stress the principle on social ecology (pal, 2010, p.167). Eco-apologists point out that Buddhist culture and life style of Buddhist monks provides an instances of how to live no acquisitively. And emphasize the rules of vinaya which prohibited monk from contaminating water, from eating of meat of wild animals, from cutting down trees. Buddhist culture as a waterproof for the importance of trees and forests. They also point out that Buddha was born, achieved his awakening, and died under trees, and that Buddhists prize forest dwelling as an ideal environmental in which to practice the religious life (Swearer, 2006, p.126). If we look at Buddhist culture in which one can find ecological significance in that culture by their life style. Buddhist doctrine like, patityasamudpāda, anattā, suññatā, tathāgatagarbha are represent a holistic, non-dualistic, nonhierarchical world view, which conjoins animals, humans and all sentient beings (Swearer, 2006, p.127). “The whole universe is a cooperative. The sun, moon, and stars life together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans, animals, trees, and the earth. When we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise...then we can build a noble environment” (Bhikku Buddhādāsa, phutasasanik kap kan anurak Thamachat [Buddhists and the care of nature] (Bangkok:komol Thimthong Foundation, 1990, p.35),. Zen Buddhism has often gives importance on the idea of ‘eco-precepts’ (Pal, 2010, P.171). And it gives focus on the self-awareness of ecology. The development of mind and self with the awareness of environment is the most effective way for solving of ecological imbalance.

In the above discussion, one can analyze the awareness about the environment which are followed by Buddhist culture. And in the next section, we can critically analyze the theories which are formed since Buddhist culture. Which are using in two ways in morality of human beings and environment. Both are inter-connected if we take the pragmatic aspect of these theories. For this purpose, I shall evaluate the view of peter Harvey along with other literature. The following theories and concepts are relevant to our purpose: the theory of Patityasamuppāda (dependent co-arising or dependent origination), the pratimokkhasutta, anātman, four brahma-viharas: meetā (universal love), karunā (compassion), Muditā

(sympathy, joy), Upekkha (forster feeling or equanimity) and their view on karma and ahimsā.



These main principle of Buddhism seem support the view that there are trance of environmental ethics in Buddhism.

**(a) The concern for environment and pratityasamutpāda:**



Pratityasamutpāda or dependent co-arising theory is concerned as the base of environmental ethics in Buddhism. Joanna Macy that the Buddha’s teaching of dependent co-arising, which she also refer to as the law of causality, applies to the object and events of daily life. She explains that for the Buddha causality did not imply one thing causing another in turn, rather it meant that things provided the appropriate or occasions for others to arise and by the arising of other these things themselves were affected. In this Macy saw-“mutuality” or a “reciprocal dynamic” where it was not the things themselves but relationship between them important.

In fact, this doctrine of Buddhism proves the interconnectedness of all entities. A mutual and reciprocal conditioning of all phenomena is based on this theory of *pratityasamutpāda* which means that everything depends on everything else. Primarily this theory focuses on the causes of sufferings, but it has also a deeper meaning that suggests the possibility of a universal application of causation to all phenomena of the world. According to this theory everything is connected to one another. That means both nature and human beings and his action towards the nature all are connected to each other. It assumes that if nature becomes affected automatically human beings must be affected and vice versa. The theory of *pratityasamutpāda* is similar to law of physics that every action has equal and opposite reaction. It states that for every type of action man can do there is a reaction of that action. If human action harms the nature, as a result man will also suffer directly or indirectly. It states that mundane activities of human being is rapidly grow day by day. He cannot balance between the nature and ongoing process. That is the result of sudden heavy rains, intense tropical storms, climate change, repeated flooding and drought are likely to increase. The disasters are now environment related. It take a heavier human toll and come with a higher tag or due to massive industrialization and machinery development we lose ozone layer and that is why there are many skin diseases and also sometimes cancer. So man be aware of his action and its result. Man and nature both are related to each other like the relationship of parents and child. Here, it means, nature is like our child and we human beings are the parents of nature. If a child does something harmful it will affected the parents and likewise. if the parents creates some problem then the child also suffers. So there is a definite relationship between nature and human beings. When we are bad to nature, we are also affected in a bad way, directly or indirectly. Human beings have some quality which makes us different to others. It is not the case that different from other means not that men are higher and others are lower but different in the sense there is a reason of common sense or there is an ability to discriminate between what is right and what is wrong. So we should practice that unique ability for the betterment of all not for one's self. I think the non-anthropocentric view of the environmental ethics is very much similar to Buddhists and the theory of *pratityasamutpāda* which is similar to law of physics, that every action has equal and opposite reaction.

Similarly, the theory of an *ātmanis* also related with the concept of environmental ethics. If we think the concept of non-self *anātman* from the perspective of *pratityasamutpadā*, we will surely find an eco-friendly attitude. According to Macy, life is made up of dynamic, self-organizing systems and the sea sustained in and through their relationship. According to such system, there is no basis for construing a-meas opposed to -other. Everything that is-me arises in interaction with everything else in the world and therefore, the re can be no fragmented, isolated self. (Sahani, 2008, p.19)

According to Macy, as Buddhism accepts the dependent nature of co-arising of phenomena, the isolation of an individual, continuing self is just not possible. From this arises a sense of interdependence in that we are profoundly interrelated and hence we are all able to recognize and act upon our intricate and intimate inter-existence with each other and all beings (Sahani, 2008, p.19). We get the concept of eco-self. Eco-self possesses a dynamic status and in this way it leads to an new concept that is the concept of ecology. In Buddhism the theory of no-self (*anātman*) is the indication of eco-self that promises the possibility of an Environment friendly attitude.

**(b) The concern for environment and four Brahma-viharas:**

Buddha himself proclaimed an ethical life for humanity which can only be obtained through Brahma-viharas. In order to maintain a virtuous life we should practice these four Brahma-viharas like, *Mettā* (universal love), *Karuṇā* (compassion), *Muditā* (sympathetic, joy), *Upekkhā* (foster feeling). All these principles are the basis for the presence of environmental ethics in Buddhism. These principles play a dual role in Buddhism, it talks about how a person can be virtuous as well as how we protect the environment from existing environmental problems. Nowadays, people become more greedy, so that in order to lead a luxurious life they exploit nature. To solve this environmental problem, we should practice universal love, compassion, sympathetic joy. We should love everyone; it is not the case that we express love towards human beings only; it is important to express our love feeling towards everybody including animals and the environment. Because this world is a mixture of human beings, animals, nature, and etc., so, in order to live a happy life, there should be coherence between nature and human beings. There should not be a feeling of higher and lower. We should practice universal love and compassion. There is a verse:

Let me have universal love for the footless; and for those with two feet; let me have universal love for those with four feet and for those with many feet.

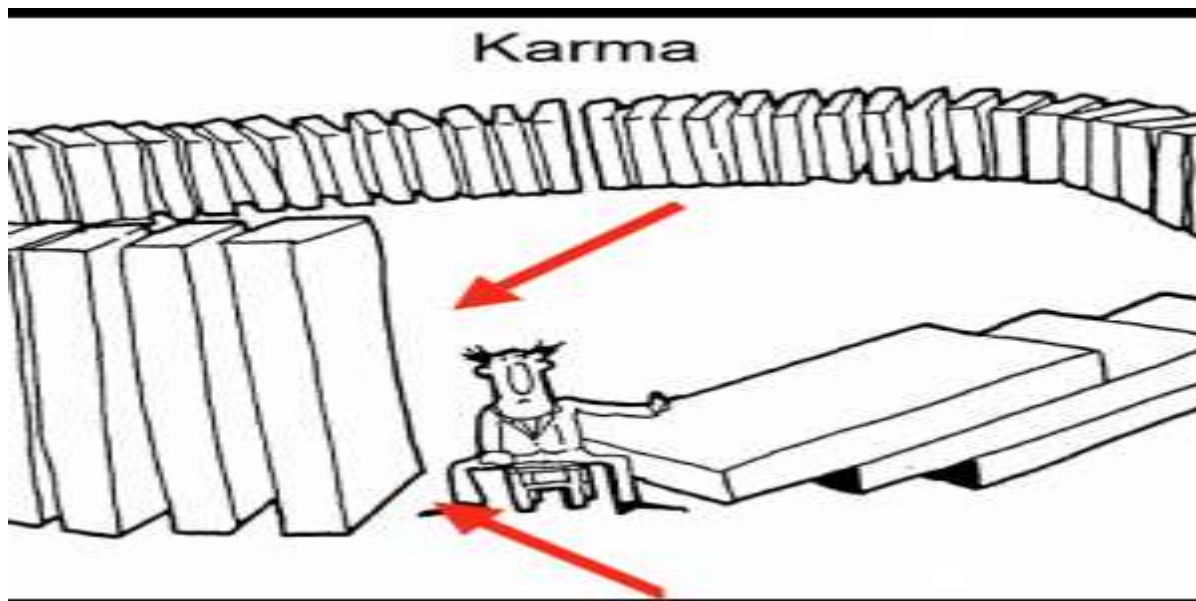
Let not the footless harm me; nor those with two feet let the four-footed harm me; nor those with many feet (Sahani, 2008).

This verse can be taken as implying three things: firstly, kindness should be practiced towards animals; secondly, it is to be practiced for one's own protection only for the verse does not specify that it should be practiced for the sake of animals. And thirdly, the sutta includes other categories of animals besides snakes—in that it mentions the footless and many-footed beings. To show of compassion and kindness towards animals may be considered as one effective way of protecting nature. It says that nature and wild animals should not be used only to meet the demand of the sophistication of human beings. Rather, human beings should extend their love to the rest of nature with an eco-friendly attitude. And it is not an alliance with nature, but the interconnectedness with it.

Buddha states that:... with a heart filled with universal love, I continue pervading one quarter, then a second the na third and then a fourth. So above, below, horizontally ,inall directions, everywhere, I continue to pervade the whole world with a heart fill eduniversal love, endless, abundant, great and free from hate and injury. With a heart filled with compassion... with a heart filled with sympathe icjoy... with a heart filled with equanimity (...somettāsaahagatenacetasaēkam disampharivā viharāmitathādutiyamtathātatiyamtathācatutthim.Iti uddham adhotiriyamsabbhisabbattāya sabbāvantaṃ lokam mettāsaahagatenacetasaāvīpūlena mahaggatenaappamānenaaverenaavyāpajjhenapharivāvīharmi. Karunāsaahagatena cetasa...muditāsaahagatenacetasa...upekkhāsaahagatenacetasa... (AI 183)

### (c) The concern of environment and the views on karma, and ahimsā:

The theories of karma and ahimsā are the main theories that proves the existence of environmental ethics in Buddhism. The doctrine of karma operates through the principle which is believed by Hindu culture that is, “As we sow, so shall we reap” (yet karma kurute, tat phala bhunkti). Action never goes waste, without producing any effect. One cannot escape the result of what he has done. If one perform bad deeds then the result of karma or deeds will be bad and if a person go for good deeds then the result will be good for him. Here the main thing is we cannot remove himself for the result of our action. May be it needs another life for the fruits of our karma. In this context Buddha discussed the theory of rebirth. And the other side of karma vāda, which is not directly find Buddhism. Though it is not said by Buddha directly but if we go for deep in Buddhist teaching we can find there is another side of Buddhist teaching is, it concern about the action of human beings towards the nature and what are the consequences of that action. Now a days we exploit nature for the fulfilment of our greed. But nature is that is enough for need, but not for our greed. So, if we use it or exploit it then one day will come we will get the result of our deeds, and the result is, we will face flood, earthquakes, volcanic eruption, tsunami, cyclonic storms. So, in order to protect himself from these types of results we should start protect the environment that’s why we can able to save himself and also our future from these types of unbearable result. If we protect them they will protect us.



The next one is ahimsā, which is one of the fundamental ethical teaching of Buddha. Ahimsā which is a mixture of ‘love’ and ‘care’. At the humblest level, because non-harming is so



fundamental to Buddhism ethics, once one realizes that excessive consumption and reproduction are harmful, one is obliged to limit such activities (Gross, 1997, p.336). The principle of complete honesty and the determination not hurt another person or animal is also a major tenet in Buddhist culture. These Buddhist principles fit the principles of ecology. Complete honesty is needed in ecology so that we do not overlook the importance of any one part in an ecosystem as complex as the earth. So too is the determination not to hurt another animal or person. By destroying causing irreversible harm to a species we may be hurting our own future chance for survive (Pal, 2010, p.167). It is the case that if we go for the root of Buddhist teaching of ahimsā, we will find that there is another side of this teaching is how we can preserve our nature. Ahimsā, is a concept it does not appears that it is only applicable for human beings only rather we can also use it in case of nature. In order to protect nature we should first practice non-violence to other along with the nature. Ahimsā is a symbol of love. So, one should practice the quality of nonviolence towards nature. We should not harm animals and also the nature. So, that no cows were killed, no goats were killed, no cocks and pigs were killed, trees not cut down for sacrificial posts nor were grasses mowing. The sacrifice was pursued with clarified butter, oil, curds, honey and molasses. In this way we enter into an eco-friendly ethics that places Buddhism in a high position among the other traditions in respect of nature and natural resources. The Buddhist monks are prohibited to have luxury good in expense of animals. Not only the monks, but also the common people are also instructed to lead their lives following five precepts. The first precept, observed by monks and lay people alike, states “I undertake the precept to obtain from taking of life.”

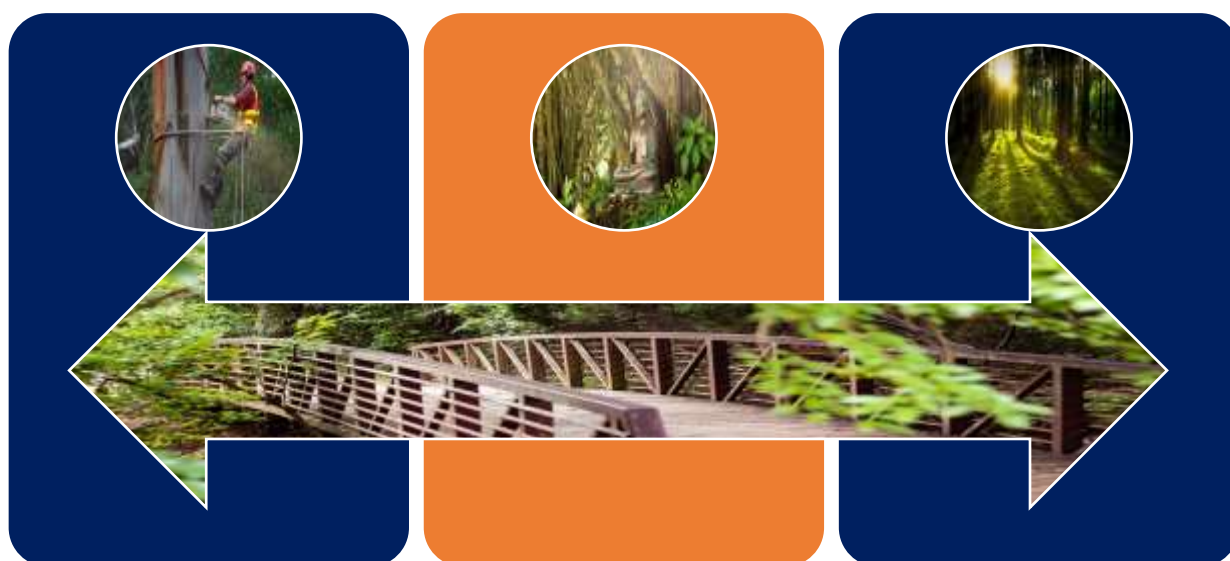


In the hierarchy of evolution, or the process of creation, human occupied the highest place in the natural world. Human are gifted with a number of unique qualities like reason, intelligence, self-consciousness, conceptual thinking, and these qualities separate them from all other beings of natural world. The possession of such unique qualities does not entitle human to treat the entire nonhuman world as a means, or a resource exclusively obtainable for their own benefit and purpose. Indeed, the unique qualities of human place certain

obligations on them to protect the interest of less evolved, or lower beings and things of natural world. It is morally unjustifiable to exploit the beings and things of natural world to satisfy human greed, rather than human needs. Just as we take better care, and show special consideration to an infant, or an insane person, so also we must take same care, and show equal concern to the lower beings and objects of nonhuman world. By and large, human attitude to nature appears to be based on an erroneous presumption. The superiority of human over nonhuman world made to believe that they alone possess intrinsic value and worth, whereas beings and things of natural world have only instrumental value, or utility value. This false view of human made them to regard that the entire natural world is for sake of satisfying their needs and greeds.

### Conclusion:

Every natural being, whether it is tiny, or giant, has its place, purpose, and worth in the vast web of life. Though mutual predation is a biological fact of life, if one natural being lives at the expense and sacrifice of other beings beyond certain limits, then the equilibrium, or harmony in nature is disturbed, which may eventually lead to a variety disasters. It is the time to change this types of behaviour towards nonhuman. And ethical teaching of Buddha culture is the positive way to change this types of mentality. Buddhists teachings is that which makes a bridge between human beings and the environment. It is seems that Buddhists view is better suited to solve the environmental problem. The relation between man and nature constitutes the ultimate basis for all environmental issues. All natural beings, whether they are plants, animals, or human, are dependent on nature for their sustenance and survival. Therefore, no natural being is independent of, and separate from nature, but it constitutes an integral part of nature. The beings and objects of natural world are interconnected and interdependent on one another, and there is perceptual action and relation between them. Thus, all natural beings, including humans, are regarded as numbers belonging to one community, that is, biotic community. And the most important thing is that human beings should develop the idea that we should protect the environment not because of our purpose rather they have also the right to live as well as human beings. So our protective attitude should be free from desire of getting something from them. Out of this discussion, here it follows that the Buddhists culture and their theory which are most fundamental for this and which is more practical in nature. One can take these as a means to lead a virtuous life and also to solve the problem of our daily life. So, Buddhists teachings support the expectations of there is environmental ethics.



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