

The Role of Buddhist Ethics in Solving the Environmental Problems

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Abstract

Buddhist ethics plays a significant role in addressing environmental problems by promoting a deep-rooted philosophy of interconnectedness, compassion towards all living beings, and the concept of non-violence (ahimsa), encouraging individuals to live in harmony with nature and minimizing harm to the environment through mindful consumption and responsible actions, thereby providing a strong ethical foundation for sustainable practices and environmental stewardship. The word 'environment' is actively being used because it needs attention more than anything else. The rush to protect environment is the minimum move one can do for oneself. Many ways of protecting the environment are discussed but until and unless people don't realize themselves to be an integral part of the environment nothing will work. Buddhism is a religion that has long recognized the interconnectedness of all things, including human and the natural world. The paper aims to build a framework for understanding the possibilities of Buddhism in order to protect the environment. As such, Buddhism has a lot to offer in terms of promoting environmental awareness and sustainability. The paper explores the ways in which Buddhist teachings and practices can be applied to environmental issues. For example, the practice of mindfulness can help us develop a deeper awareness of the natural world and our impact on it. Buddhist concepts such as non-attachment and non-harming can help cultivate a more sustainable relationship with the environment. The study concludes by offering a foundation to develop a new way for protecting the environment with inner self involvement. Buddhist path of moral action, mindfulness and meditation, and wisdom, the figure of the bodhisattva, who is dedicated to working to lessen the suffering of all sentient beings, serves as a model of sustaining a commitment to working toward what may seem like an impossible lofty goal. The study demonstrates the potential for Buddhism to play a role in fostering environmental awareness and sustainability examining the ways in which Buddhist teachings and practices can be applied to environmental challenges.

Keywords: Buddhism, environment, sustainability, nonviolence, possibilities, challenges, awareness, meaningful actions

Introduction:

The environmental problems faced by our earth today are unusual and unprecedented in nature. Unavoidable challenges of the environment like air depletion, air pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation and degradation of forests etc. has made our earth fall into the trap of existential crisis. However, over exploitation of natural resources has caused us to question our relation with limited natural resources. On one hand, humans connect themselves with the environment through the habitat provided by natural resources. On the other hand, humans have become the destruction of their own homes. With such realization, an urgent need to protect the environment has been discussed and decided by people around the world. However, until and unless people don't recognize themselves as an integral part of the environment nothing will work. It is a must to analyze our attitude towards the environment in an ethical manner (Sharma, 2007).

Environmental ethics is essential for protecting the environment, species, and resources. It promotes sustainable practices and encourages people to become more aware of the impact of their actions on the environment. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living things and the need to respect them (Gowans, 2014).

Buddhism, Man and Society:

Man is born into society, brought up in society and he continues to live in society until his death. An ascetic, too, leaves behind all his encumbrances of household life and departs to forest, carries with him the experience he acquired when he was living in society. Man being a social animal, he acquires his human nature or humane qualities from living in society and maintains relations through communication with the other members who constitute society. There is no society without humans and no humans without society. This interdependence of society and man is persisting not only for the sake of mutual survival but also for the fulfillment of higher ideals related to both man and society. Society existed long before we are born into it and it will continue to exist even long after we are dead and gone.

The inter-relationship of man and society is accepted in Buddhism. Hence social ethics in Buddhism is for the welfare of both man and society. The five precepts (Pancasila), the four sublime abodes (cattari Brahmavihara), the four ways of showing favour (cattari samgahavatthuni) and the ten wholesome deeds (Dasakusala) often discussed in the canonical texts vindicate Buddhism's social concern taking the individual as an integral part of it (Pruthi et al., 2011). Therefore, Buddhist ethics becomes meaningful only in the context of society.

Buddhism allows us to think, analyse and recognize the environment as an integral part of one's life. Such a way of thinking would be helpful in combating climate change. This paper tries to analyse Buddhist insights and will be able to aid in this effort. It is possible to argue that the environmental crisis is also a crisis of human soul (Thathong, 2012).

Environment and Buddhism:

The term 'environment' refers to a broader domain encompassing all aspect of biology, physiology, ecology and society that have an impact on human health and wellbeing, either directly or indirectly (Sharma,

2007). Today, when the environment is seen degraded or destroyed, humanity faces the consequences of difficulties. Environment is a complex of so many things (light, temperature, soil, water, etc.) which surround an organism. Any external force, substance or condition, which surrounds and affects the life of an organism in any way, becomes a factor of its environment. These factors have been variously called as environmental factors, ecological factors or simply factors and may be living as well as non-living. The sum of all these living and non-living factors makes the environment of an organism.

Buddhist ethics plays a significant role in addressing environmental problems by promoting compassion for all living beings, emphasizing the interconnectedness of nature, advocating for mindful consumption, and encouraging a simple lifestyle that minimizes harm to the environment through practices like “Right Livelihood” (Gowans, 2014; Siderits, 2017).

Aims and Objectives of the Research:

In present day situation, the ethical teaching of Buddhism is still relevant. The main and objective of the study are –

1. To analyze the ethical teachings of Buddha Philosophy.
2. To explain about the ethical aspects of Buddhism.
3. To understand different aspects of environmental ethics.
4. To study the role of Buddha’s ethics in environmental activism.

Methodology:

The present study entitled “The Role of Buddhist Ethics in Solving the Environmental Problems” adopts a qualitative research design based on textual analysis and critical interpretation. It follows a descriptive analytical research design. The descriptive approach is employed to present the conceptual background, historical development, and theoretical perspectives related to the Buddhist ethics and environmental concerns. The analytical approach is applied to critically examine interpretations and differing viewpoints found in the selected texts. The study relies on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include original texts and literary works relevant to Buddhist ethical and environmental thought. Secondary sources consist of published books, peer-reviewed journal articles, edited volumes and authenticated academic websites. The collected materials are examined through thematic analysis, which involves identifying key themes, concepts, and patterns across texts. In addition, contextual interpretation is applied to situate these texts within their social and historical contexts.

Significance of the Study:

Buddha was primarily an ethical teacher and a social reformer than a theoretical philosopher. Because according to him, human existence is full of misery and pain. So, our immediate duty is to get rid of this misery and pain. This research is trying to examine the role of Buddhist ethics in solving the environmental problems. Buddha’s ethical teaching is more emphasized on morality and through this how to society can overcome from

obstacles and sufferings of life. Buddha's ethical teachings gives us some ways to practice in practical life that people can reach the ultimate goal 'Nirvana' (Bloom, 1972).

Key aspects of Buddhist Ethics related to Environmentalism:

Compassion for all beings: A central Buddhist teaching, extending compassion to all living creatures, including plants and animals, naturally leads to a desire to protect nature and its inhabitants (Bloom, 1972).

Interconnectedness of life: Buddhism teaches that all things are interconnectedness and interdependent, meaning harm to the environment ultimately harms ourselves (Siderits, 2017).

Non-violence: The principle of non- violence extends to not harming nature encouraging practices like vegetarianism and avoiding unnecessary destruction (Gowans, 2014).

Right Livelihood: One of the eight-fold path principles, encouraging individuals to choose occupations that minimize harm to the environment and promote sustainability (Pruthi et al., 2011).

Mindful consumption: Buddhist teachings promote awareness of one's actions and consumption patterns, encouraging moderation and reducing waste (Thathong, 2012).

Respect of nature: Buddhism views nature as sacred and worthy of reverence, encouraging people to live in harmony with the natural world (Bloom, 1972).

How Buddhist Ethics can be Applied to Environmental Issues:

Supporting conservation effects: By practicing compassion and recognizing the value of all life, Buddhists can actively participate in efforts to protect endangered species and natural habitats (Thathong, 2012).

Promoting sustainable practices: Living simply, reducing consumption, and choosing eco-friendly options are encouraged to minimize environmental impact (Sharma, 2007).

Educating communities: Buddhists teachings can be used to raise awareness about environmental issues and inspire people to take action to protect the planet (Gowans, 2014).

Engaging in environmental activism: Buddhist communities can actively participate in environmental campaigns and advocate for policies that promote sustainability (Trone, 2018).

Buddhist Ethics in Solving the Environmental Problems:

Environment and its sustainability can only be done when people have basic knowledge about nature. The eco system, biodiversity, the ecology and the atmosphere are subjective which must be taught to students so that they can learn and contribute to Mother Earth. Environmental education assists students in creating a personal spiritual connection with the environment, which increases their desire and willingness to take environmental action (Thathong, 2012). Buddha's emphasis on the peaceful co-existence of people and nature, for instance, shows that he is aware of how interdependent all living things are with their surroundings (Pruthi et al., 2011).

Buddhism is recognized in its teachings as one of the top religions for putting forth concepts related to

sustainability and environmental protection. These ideas can be found in Buddhist teachings as well as in its ritualistic structure and modes of daily practice (Siderits, 2017). Buddhist philosophical concepts regarding environmental preservation and sustainable development are crucial for both theory and practice.

Buddhist teachings encourage a sense of collective responsibility and emphasize the importance of working towards the common good. Therefore, Buddhism can be a valuable resource for individuals and communities who are looking to take action to protect the environment and create a more sustainable future (Trone, 2018). Ultimately, the teachings of Buddhism can help individuals cultivate a greater sense of awareness, compassion, and responsibility towards the environment, and inspire them to take meaningful action to address the environmental challenges we face today.

Conclusion:

Buddhist teachings emphasize the interdependence and interconnectedness of all living beings, including humans and the natural world. Therefore, the well-being of the natural environment is crucial for the well-being of all living beings.

Buddhist ethics offer a valuable framework for addressing environmental concerns by fostering a deep-rooted understanding of interconnectedness, compassion, and responsibility towards the natural world, providing a strong ethical foundation for sustainable practices and environmental activism.

In conclusion, Buddha offers a comprehensive and practical approach to ethics and morality, guiding practitioners to cultivate ethical conduct, mental discipline and wisdom through the Five precepts, the Eight-fold Path and the Bodhisattva Ideal. Buddhist ethics and morality are theoretical concepts and practical guidelines that can be applied in daily life, inspiring practitioners to live more compassionate responsible and engaged lives. Buddhist philosophy, ethics and morality principles can provide valuable insights and guidance for living a meaningful and fulfilling life.

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