

## The Buddhist View towards Nature

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Received: February 19, 2025; Revised: April 17, 2025; Accepted: April 21, 2025

### Abstract

This paper will explore the Buddhist view towards nature with the references from Pali Canon and Buddhist scholars which is related to this topic. As we understand that the Buddha himself has mentioned in Pali canon or Tipitaka such as Kudadanda Sutta of Digha Nikaya, Dīghajānu Sutta of Anguttara Nikāya and Vinaya Pitaka and so on that he paid much attention towards the nature. When we study the history of the Buddha, since the Prince Siddhartha Gautama (to be the Buddha) was born until the Buddha passed away, his life was related to nature without objection. However, many times human beings' relationships are not smooth and conducted in an orderly manner with nature. These problems are mainly due to differences in their cultures, environments, education, and ways of thinking or viewpoints. These differences start to harm nature, and one way used to solve these problems is that of harm to nature.

**Keywords:** Buddha's Teaching; Monastic Code and Nature

### Introduction

This paper will explore the Buddhist attitude toward nature and is divided into many subtitles which are related to the main title. It will be attributed to how the Buddha maintained and paid much attention towards nature. Nature is one and important for living beings. This paper will also study human natural life and environment. Nature itself is serene and peaceful and without any harm. By studying the history of humans, it seems that harm has been a standard practice since the Stone Age. Harms from the past until the present have started for many reasons, for example harms to gain control of power, harms to seek a fair balance of power, civil wars, and wars to expand land or political ideology and even wars to defend one's country. Mindfulness in nature can create mentality and physicality living in happiness. Nowadays our world needs to be green, clean and fresh, so that we will have a healthy life. Environmental energy for people and animals comes from nature. For the better now and future life, we should uphold Buddhist principles such as honesty of moral life, virtuous ecology, nature law, positive thinking and the right attitude to relationship of ecological connection. Therefore, environmental nature will be protected by good nurturing.

It is well-known that Buddhism is a religion that emphasizes the importance of mercy, non-violence, peace, forgiveness, and respect towards nature. Buddhism is also against the taking of life, whether human or animal, as demonstrated by the first Buddhist precept or the Buddhist principle "to abstain from killing living beings." The Buddha knew that killing only brings about loss for humankind, loss for the killer, loss for society, and loss for the killed. The first principle is also a key role in maintaining a good social environment.

The Buddha's teaching has mentioned a good society, environment, and nature. We must avoid killing or harming others and to be compassionate, not stilling and appreciative joy, non-adultery but keep performing loving kindness to oneself and others, not telling lies but to be equanimity, and not intoxication but to keep mindfulness one and others.

## **Buddhist Morality Approaching to Environment**

The five precepts are (pañca sila) the form of the minimum code of ethics to preserve the environment. The first precept involves abstention from injury to life. The casting aside of all forms of weapons, being conscientious about depriving a living being of life. In a positive sense; the cultivation of compassion and sympathy for all living things. Buddhism also prescribes the practice of loving-kindness (metta) towards all creatures or the environment of all quarters without restriction. The Karaniyametta Sutta enjoins the cultivation of loving-kindness towards all creatures timid and steady, long and short, big and small, minute and great, visible and invisible, near and far, born and awaiting birth.

The Buddha has also mentioned in the Vinaya Pitaka that there several rules prohibit monks from polluting green grass and water with saliva, urine, and feces. Humans are a part of society as well as other living creatures, which includes plants and animals. We are doing our part to keep the environment safe, protected and secure. The acts of humans lead to environmental pollution. The stronger demand for resources is also a factor that contributes to the problem as we all need food and shelter. All quarters are to be suffused with this loving attitude towards the environment.

When we come to think and discuss Buddhist attitudes to the environment, we might understand that the Buddha explained elements of the world. It has four great energetic elements (māhabhūta) namely: 1) solidity (pathavī), 2) liquidity (apo), 3) heat (tejo), and 4) mobility (vāyo). These are the most significant elements for all living beings and nonliving beings to rely on for surviving or existing. People live in society, and society depends on the environment. If the environment is good, the people and society may also be good. So, this kind of living situation can lead both the people and society to moral life.

Self-moral and societal morals are interconnected to each other. Most lay Buddhists observe five precepts to have a good principle for maintaining the environment. In return, the good environment will naturally take responsibility for the welfare of humans and animals in direct and indirect ways. As Peter Harvey pointed out that: The environment is thus held to respond to the state of human morality. (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2010)

It is right. Self-morality and societal practices of the Dhamma is very important. When we (ourselves) and society have Dhamma in mind, our life will be happy and peaceful by observing good morality among society and beyond. In Buddhism, the Buddha himself always approached the forest entire life. If the Buddhist and non-Buddhists continuously observe the pressurized morality in their heart, the fertilizer of the environment can be survived. In return, they will have longevity by approaching the natural environment as a result. (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2010)

## **Human Nature of Aesthetic in Buddhist Perspective**

In regards to the human nature of aesthetics in a Buddhist perspective, we can assume that the life of the prince Siddhartha since he was born and until the Enlightenment was related to preserving nature. As we learnt that he was born under the blossoming sala tree, accompany his father-plowing ceremony at the opening of the sowing season, wandering ascetic-in the banks of the river Anoma, practicing-austerities and meditation in the Uruvela, getting enlightened-under the Bodhi tree, giving a talk-deer park and passing away-sala tree grove.

In his teaching mentioned in the Kutadanta Sutta, the Buddha suggested how to preserve human nature and how to develop economics instead of force to reduce crime, the state holder should use the country's resources to improve the economic conditions of the country. It could embark on agricultural and rural development, provide financial support to entrepreneurs and business, and provide adequate wages for workers to maintain a decent life with human dignity. Rukkho nama pupphalhaladharo; this is the most important of a tree; it is giving fruits and flowers without expecting anything for the benefit of human beings, rukkho

upagatamanupaviththanam janaram; chaya deti; the tree provides its shadow to anyone who approaches it for resting, rukkho chaya venattam na karoti; the tree provides its shadow to anyone who approaches it without any discrimination, even to a person who comes with an idea of cutting it.

Nowadays, the problem is that people do not see the beauty of nature. They (greedy people) cut down the tree for their possession, then the beauty of nature becomes decaying and deforestation. If they understand that their life is always in the part of nature, depending on nature, their beauty also comes from nature; they should not destroy natural forests. Without nature, we cannot produce any materials for use. Subjectivist viewpoint, to see the beauty of nature, we must think and feel from ourselves into nature. So, we will gain insight into how nature makes good things for all. The attitude to approach beautiful nature is the positive outlook. Considering that: the Buddha and His disciples regarded natural beauty as a source of great joy and aesthetic satisfaction. (Sandell, 1987)

The Buddhist perspective feels that nature is reflective to create happiness which comes from great contentment. It means that not only to be happy for the outside appearance, but also for inside feeling. Hence, Buddhist's view sees and approaches to maintain the beauty both inner and outer of the human/animals and the natural world.

## **Upholding Buddhist Philosophy Towards Nature**

Many creatures all are of a blissful heart. (Gnanarama, 1996) Mostly Buddhist philosophical teaching comes from the noble heart. It means to make loving-kindness for all beings to be happy in daily life. This is the aim of which various Buddhists share their loving-kindness (mettā) frequently after chanting. That is what the Buddhists uphold their philosophical attitude to approach natural beings among society and beyond.

In Mahavagga Pali, Vinaya Pitaka, regarding a discussion of harm, the Buddha decreed a monks' rule: monks must not support the decision of government officers and soldiers to enter the monkhood. In the Buddha's time, many government officers and soldiers escaped their duty to become monks. This caused damage to the government, as there were shortages in the armed forces needed to manage and protect the country. Another reason for the creation of this rule is that King Pasenadi requested the Buddha to forbid monks to accept government officers into the monkhood because some of them may have no faith in Buddhism and might harm the monks. This rule is still practiced at present. Thai government officers from all departments who wish to enter the monkhood must obtain permission and receive approval from the government beforehand.

Here we thought that Buddhism is the supreme philosophy which can deal with many problems. It also could solve natural crises. When we think back in the time of the Buddha, his lifespan was that birth, enlightenment, and demise, took place under the trees in open air. (Gnanarama, 1996)

This showed the cases how the Buddha himself upheld omniscient wisdom lived peacefully in nature entire his life, and considering that he also advised his disciples to approach the forest where there was serene situation for developing spirituality. That is why; Buddhism maintains nature for sustainability of everything. Buddhist also sees that everything comes from nature and changed by nature. Especially, as we, Buddhist implements the eco-philosophy is that regarding natural laws impermanence, Buddhism still holds that man's position in nature is unique one. (Sandell, 1987)

Because a moral man could deal with environmental crises. As a result, if he makes more effort to be intelligently involved with nature, his spiritual life will be also posited by harmonious relations in nature. In Thailand, spiritual thought and acts of tree ordination are very special. It is a new idea to carry out this work out for the local forest growing up and environmental sustainability.

Moreover, the ordination of the trees means protecting the forest. Reforestation is the most important activity to plant trees for greenery and cleanliness which makes welfare for natural forest. To approach this work, one or leaders of society should have virtues and integrity and contentment involving nature.

As the Rama IX, His Majesty King Bhumibhon Adulyadaj established one concept ‘sufficiency economy philosophy’ urged his people to suffice earning through their incomes. This means morality must be observed while people are trying to have adequate food or materials. This attitude takes care of nature from a Buddhist perspective. It inspires all people to engage in environmental harmony with spirituality.

## Buddhist Virtue on Environmental Ecology

Buddhist moral principles mostly value the core teaching of Buddhist ethics. An ethical viewpoint on the nature of ecology is to take care of the trees, the jungle, and rivers to purify the environment. Humans and animals are always dependent on food from nature. Thus, the natural environment as vegetables is used for human consumption. (Sandell, 1987) So, without nature, humans and animals cannot survive. That is why we must consume food. Vegetables as food come from resources of the natural environment. As we see the world these days, there are two natures. These are nature and the environmental nature. They are relying on each other. To make the natural ecology green, clean, fresh and sustainable, we all must protect the environment from our virtues and goodness.

Ethical perspective, a good life comes from acting on ecological and environmental education. Then the right knowledge is very significant for all people. If they have the right understanding, they will be virtuous. In addition, holding their virtuous devotion, they shall protect the environment and preserve the ecology. This is the way of survival. And then, stepping into sustainable life and moral philosophy is undertaken to self-practice and others as well. As mentioned in the chart below, virtue causally leads the Buddhist life to be happy through environmental ecology.

Virtuous life leading to}	Welfare	} for the benefits of oneself and others
	Freedom	
	Happiness	

Everyone needs benefits of mental and physical welfare, freedom and a happy life for oneself and others. This is the nature of humans and animals. So, to approach the right livelihood, virtue is assumed to apply in daily life. Therefore, the Buddha's recommendation regarding the cultivation of the virtues of compassion (anukampā) and nonviolence (ahimsā) was unique in that it applied to both one and others. (Kalupahana, 1995)

As we are doing charity, virtues also should be applied to reach kindness or compassion and not killing another being. Yes, that is right. Without virtues there is no path to approach compassion, not to mention loving-kindness. That is why Buddhist virtues deal with the problem of hatred and violence. According to Agganna Sutta of the Digha Nikaya describes how a man impelled by greed begins to continuously and ruthlessly exploit nature, and in return nature return reacts by withdrawing away its bountifulness and abundance. In the Cakkavattisihanada Sutta of the Digha Nikaya also attempts to drive this point in: it shows the exact correlation between decline in human discipline and degeneration of nature. Thus, from not giving properly to the needy, taking of life increased, and from taking of life, lying increased; and of the children whole life span hand been forty thousand years remain now for only twenty thousand. Just as an individual, the state too, is held to be responsible for the conservation of the environment. This is very clearly stated in Sutta. The Buddha very skillfully

used ethical ideas to encourage his ideas to encourage his followers to engage in conservation and protection of nature.

Today, due to wide spread consumerism, people have become insensitive to the needs of conserving nature. They are not concerned about sustaining nature: instead, their aim is to obtain the maximum in the present. Therefore, with the destruction for nature-forest, water reserves, mountain etc., there is an unprecedented changing climate, rapid recurrence of natural calamities, obscure rains at the proper time, earthquakes, sea-erosion and even tsunamis are the result of massive exploitation of nature by man. This is totally contrary to the teaching of the Buddha. Again, many problems of today are the result of these activities of exploitation on the part of man.

Compassion and nonviolence are the special parts to utilize both for us (natural beings) and the natural environment. As humans and animals rely on nature and the environment, we should protect and plant more trees to make the forests green and clean of our natural forests. In the Buddhist ecological view, the Buddha inspired all people to nourish the environment. As a result, planting of trees was a good deed which brings about birth in heavenly world. (Kalupahana, 1995)

We come to know that nurturing the natural environment and planting the trees which is in good behavior, is a good deed. It helps us to reach the realm of heaven. In Lakkhana Sutta, Dhiga Nikaya, the Buddha has pointed that if someone has done undertook skillful behaviors such as good conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, giving and sharing, taking precepts, observing the sabbath, paying due respect to mother and father, ascetics and brahmins, honoring the elders in the family, and various other things pertaining to skillful behaviors. Due to performing, accumulating, heaping up, and amassing those deeds, when his body broke up, after death, he was reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm. So, peace and happiness come from a better natural environment and result in this very life and beyond.

## **Environment**

Environment is essential for human beings and creatures. Air, water, and land are called the environment. And it can be divided into two types of environments: natural environment-physical surroundings that provides for men and geographic environment-particular area, such as the mountains, plants, animals, as well as elements of the earth's surface. In our surroundings, we encounter various types of it, including the forest environment and the familial environment. Let us focus on the forest first. According to Agganna Sutta, Digha Nikaya has mentioned that after a very long period had passed, solid nectar curdled in the water. It appeared just like the curd on top of hot milk as it cools. It was beautiful, fragrant, and delicious, like ghee or butter. And it was as sweet as pure bee-honey. Now, one of those beings was greedy. Thinking, 'Oh my, what might this be?' the being tasted the solid nectar with its finger. The being enjoyed it, and craving arose in it. And other beings, following that being's example, tasted solid nectar with their fingers. They too enjoyed it, and craving arose in them.

Nowadays, we face numerous challenges such as floods, intense heat from the sun, and erratic rainfall during the rainy season. Upon closer examination, these issues stem from our neglect of the natural environment in the forest. Failure to protect the forest environment leads to these problems. Preserving this environment is crucial for the advancement of many countries. Therefore, it is imperative that we refrain from harming the forest's natural habitat. It is important to remember that if we disturb the natural balance of the forest, it may retaliate against us. The acts of humans lead to environmental pollution and stronger demand for resources is also a factor that contributes to the problem as we all need more and more cloth, food, shelter, and medicine. According to the Buddha's teaching for the measures for environmental conservation is that we have to encourage people to observe the basic five

precepts, follow the right action (samma kammanta), and the right livelihood (samma ajiva) strictly and regularly, indulgence in alcohol and drug abuse would be significantly reduced.

## **Benefits from Natural Environment**

Living beings want longevity. In this case, they need to depend upon the natural forest and environment. Being with nature integrates into healthy life. Hence, the forest ensures a healthy harmony in people's lives both physically and mentally. (Hearvey, 2013) Body and mind need full health for living a long life. That is why we should take our physical and mental movement to connect with the natural environment. In doing this, the benefits of a healthy body and peaceful mind will certainly be gained from the natural environment. Exhaling and inhaling from purified nature is the best healing of the body and mind. Naturally, as Padmasiri de Siva mentioned that A very deep understanding of our mind and body enables us to see them as a state of nature, and human nature in this sense does no violence to the natural environment. (Kolak, and Martin, 2006) Knowing oneself makes everything better. So, whenever we know the mind and the body, then we are encouraged to center our mind as parts of nature. If we understand nature as a part of our senses, we will not damage or hurt the natural environment. Afterward, nature will be nurtured by our caring honesty.

Provided that, we could survive through cherishing nature. For volunteering this movement, Buddhist ethical philosophy would enhance to conserve a good environment. Because the Buddhist have been nourishing the forest. Then, nature is still alive in some parts of the Buddhist countries. However, in some parts of its regions, trees are cut down for some of their own benefit. That is because of greedy people. Instead of reforestation, they do deforestation. In this case, we must discuss with them how deforestation could destroy our life and damage the natural environment.

In contrast, if there is sufficient nature, there are also benefits as a result. So, Peter Harvey again says that it protects its own forests, though and it has a good record on pollution control, energy conservation and recycling. (Hearvey, 2013) Yes, it is acceptable. If there is a deep forest, nature will exist. Forest itself removes the smoke, cleans the dust and prevents dirty things. It also grows food for humans and animals, even fresh air for comfortable breathing. When we try to use natural resources in the right way from the forest, it will give us more benefits such as sufficient food, living health and persistence. In return, if we want the most beneficial synergy and forest sustainability, we should protect it and plant trees to make a greenhouse in our places. In addition, creating natural recycling is generating the energy of natural resources for conservation. This is the benefit of the natural environment. Positively, people have the advantage of maintaining natural resources for providing the needs of humans and animals. Therefore, if we have time to live, we might have time to preserve the natural environment. If we do not have forests, it will not rain; if it will not rain there will not be trees; the rain can make the forest look natural; if the forest is rich it can protect against floods and storms. And, if we do not have forests, there will be no fresh air. Therefore, forests are important. The Buddha explains the arising of the natural world in Dighajana Sutta of Anguttara Nikaya that there are season-law, physical laws (utuniyama), seed-law, biological laws (bijaniyama), psychological laws (cittaniyama), moral laws (kammaniyyama), and causal laws (dhammaniyyama). While the first four laws operate within their respective spheres, the last-mentioned law of causality operates within each of them as well as among them.

In the path of paticcasamuppada they depend on us, we depend on them, if they do not depend on us, we do not depend on them. In Nidana Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha has also mentioned that it just as when seeds are not broken, not rotten, not damaged by wind, heat, capable of sprouting, well-buried, planted in well-prepared soil, and the rain-god would offer good streams of rain. Those seeds would thus come to growth, increase, & abundance. In the same way, any action performed with greed... performed with aversion... performed with

delusion - born of delusion, caused by delusion, originating from delusion: wherever one's selfhood turns up, there that action will ripen. Where that action ripens, there one will experience its fruit, either in this very life that has arisen or further along in the sequence.

The Dhamma is the paradigm for keeping the relationship of man in balance with all beings in the universe. This is difficult in practice because the balanced relationship is being broken through the consumerist and materialistic values of modern society. Forests are being cut down, fish and animals are almost no more to be seen in the wild. These facts are evidence of the corrupt relationship between man and the environment.

Even though we are in the right place it does not mean everything is perfect. In addition to the right place, we must have a good milieu, good advisers, and people who can give encouragement. If we do not stay in good milieus we will suffer, we will not know how to fix the problems and will never succeed. If we have good people close to us, we will develop good communication with the people that I told above as for you also will develop. The Bad Milieu that I mention is such as friends who encourage you to do bad things. The bad thing that I mean it like a gambling, playing cards, drinking, taking amphetamines, stealing, rape of another person, etc. I want you to have a good milieu and communicate with people who have good reactions. To see the good milieu for the development of life is important, and it is important that we put ourselves in the right place.

If we are businessmen, it is in a bad trading period during a downturn in business or when trading is good and good business, even if we are students, we fail the exam or we pass the exam, there will be people who praise us or there will be people who criticize us. However, we must have stable mental strength and do not forget our goals and keep trying to do what you want is important.

After we have mental strength, we should be an orderly person and behave well. If we did not use good regulations and good methods before, continuing to continue doing well is difficult. Whatever, if we have done it before, if we want to do it. Like a person traveling on a road, they have never walked before, they would not dare walk. If they had walked once, they would dare to go. Seems like the person who has done bad things before will continue to do bad things.

Therefore, we must do the good things first to continue doing the good things. We will be like the light of the candle that light will continue to shine brightly and will never be destroyed. Moreover, the people who do better are like people who deposit their money in the bank. In the bank, no matter how much money we deposit, interest will come out every month. Therefore, having done good things before, we will continue to do good. Life of the people needs better strength of both mentality and physicality from now toward the future. Even in a single moment, life wants to stay in peace. In the present day our world needs to be a fresh and beautiful place. This healthy, invaluable and beneficial life has gotten by environmental energy.

## Conclusion

We can come to conclude that the Buddhist view towards nature that being needs to prevent economic injustice, eliminate corruption, and protect the environment and consumers from exploitation. The Buddha also encourages business people to be energetic, mindful, pure indeed, self-controlled, considerate, right living, and heedful. Furthermore, the Buddha advises people to develop four qualities and protect from developing negative attitudes towards nature and its use of confidence in the law of karma, morality or virtue, generosity, and discernment as to the true nature of reality. We also obtain everything from natural resources.

To conserve these important things, we should hold Buddhist principles such as—moral aesthetic, virtuous ecology, natural environment, positive thinking and the right attitude to nurture and protect our natural world. The ways of making a green and clean world are fundamental to approaching a purified life. It means a healthy and valuable life. Buddhist

morality makes natural fertilizer for environments. Natural law and spiritual matters depend on each other.

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