

Global Ecological Crisis and Contribution of Buddhist Monks in Its Conservation

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ABSTRACT

Abhidhamma is the high technical content about Paramartha four factors, including psychological and mental factors form the metaphysics nirvana is like the essence of Buddhism. Have a deep and lead to a better understanding of the nature of life. The action and the result of the action of worlds landscape of the cycle of birth and death. And the conduct to escape the cycle of birth and death. Which is the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

Keywords: Abhidhamma Interpretation, Thai Elder Buddhist Monks

1. Introduction

The ecological crisis has rightly come to be recognized as one of the serious problems of the present world. Lackness of the critical awareness of the socio-economic and political structure of the present society is responsible for our poor understanding of the crisis. Scholars are digging into various cultural traditions to find out remedies to it. Ethical codes inherent in major religions invoked to bring man and nature relationship back to harmonious level. Our effort is to find out how far Buddhist concepts are helpful in understanding the present crisis and in providing insights for a solution. Can we have Buddhist model of economic development, free from ecological degradation? More deeply, time has come for us to ask, what contribution Buddhism can make to create an alternative vision of modernity. (P.C. Pandey, 2008: 140)

Buddhist ecology includes both living and non-living aspects of nature. The love for nature in Buddhism is so deep rooted that we can't overlook this attractive aspect, particularly when the entire world is experiencing ecological crisis. The blessed One has discovered a triangular relationship amongst human beings, plants and animals and their role on ecology from the ethical perspective. He has

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greatly stressed on the reality that nature and human beings need to live in close harmony and plants and animals should be the objects of unlimited kindness and benevolence. (Pathak, S.K., 2004: 61)

2. Western World View

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi has precisely revealed the relevance of Buddha's doctrines for the development of ecological ethics in the undernoted words: "With its philosophic insight into interconnectedness and thoroughgoing interdependence of all conditioned things, with its thesis that happiness is to be found the restraint of desire, with its goal of enlightenment through renunciation and contemplation and its ethic of non-injury and boundless loving-kindness for all beings. Buddhism provides the entire essential for a relationship to the natural world characterized by respect, care and compassion." (Sandell, Klas, ed. *Buddhist Perspectives on the Ecocrisis*, 1987. p. vii, Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Foreword*).

We are facing eco-crisis because of our immoral deeds and impure intention. Man has spoiled the beautiful landscapes, green valleys of mountains, poisoned the air, land and water- body in the pursuit of faster economic growth. Population explosion and lacks of eco-awareness also play a significant role in upsetting the ecological balance. (Pandey, P.C, 2008 : 52)

One single factor that contributes to a healthy environment is a dense and rich forest cover. Forest provides a natural, pure and peaceful surrounding to those who seek solitude and peace. Moreover, existence of the green cover on the earth is the life span of human society. (Chitakara, M.G., 2000: 133) In *Suttanipāṭa* it is mentioned: "the tree that gives you pleasant shade, to sit or lie at need, you should not tear its branches down, a cruel want on deed." (*Suttanipāṭa* : 296-297)

Cambodian Pagodas become eco-centres

After years of suppression under the Khmer Rouge and the unrest that followed, Cambodian people are rebuilding a sense of community. And as in the old days, in both villages and towns the re-emerging centres of community life tend to be the pagodas. Today the monks and nuns are helping people claim the right to education, and guiding them to understand, protect and improve their environment. (<http://arcworld.org>)

Since 2005 the ABE (ABE = Association of Buddhists for the Environment) has been creating a network of monks from all of Cambodia's 23 provinces working to strengthen the Sangha, or community of Buddhist monks and nuns, in order to protect the environment. The ABE was founded in Phnom Penh on 9th March 2005 with the presence of His Eminence of Sangaraja Bou Kry. It was supported by ARC (ABE = Association of Buddhists for the Environment) as the consultants of World Bank Asia Faiths/Forest Initiative and for the outreach workshops and training it worked closely with the conservation NGO, Mlup Baitong. (ABE = Association of Buddhists for the Environment)

It is part of the Asian Buddhist Network, initially set up with the help of ARC and the World Bank, and run by monks for monks. It provides capacity building, training and advice for monks throughout the country. Under its director, Venerable Hiek Sopheap it also produces films and educational material, runs tree nurseries and also is engaged in a programme to ordain trees, as monks are ordained, in order to protect them and the forest around them. (<http://arcworld.org>)

3. Ecological Experience in Mongolia:

A: Gandan Tegchenling Monastery

Gandan in Ulaanbaatar is the largest and most important monastery in Mongolia today, with more than 850 monks. Its name signifies Great Place of Complete Joy. Gandan Monastery, along with Erdene Zuu, has been a pioneer of conscious Buddhist environmentalism in Mongolia. It has been a central monastery in the work that ARC, WWF (WWF = World Wide Fund for Nature) and the World Bank have undertaken, and a key example for other monasteries wanting to participate in environmental work. (<http://arcworld.org>)

As Ven. Da Lama Bayambajav, who acts as a liaison between Gandan Monastery and environmental NGOs, elaborates: "Gandan Monastery's focus is on the teaching of Buddhism; however environmental protection is an integral part of Buddhist training both here and in other monasteries. Monks are taught not to cut trees, not to pollute water and to love the area because of karma." (<http://arcworld.org>)

Projects conducted by the Gandan Monastery on the environment include:

1. Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet.

This was a programme developed by WWF and ARC to create a term of recognition for significant new projects launched by the world's faiths at a major meeting in Kathmandu in 2000. Gandan Monastery participated by reintroducing a centuries-old ban on hunting the snow leopard and the saiga antelope, both of which are endangered. (<http://www.arcworld.org>)

In 2001 the Sacred Gift was extended to including the re-creation of seven traditional Buddhist Sacred Reserves, which include the Bogd Khaan Mountain (Mongolia's oldest Buddhist protected area) and the Khan Kentii Strictly Protected area.

2. Sacred Mongolia Series Publications: Sacred Sites of Mongolia (2001), Legends of the Land (2001), and Worship of Sacred Sites (2004).

3. The Northern Buddhist Conference on Ecology and Development.

4. Installation of six stelae to mark six natural sacred sites. (<http://arcworld.org>)

B: Onstar Isei Lin Monastery

In October 2005 Onstar Isei Lin Monastery in Baganuur District, some 140 kilometres west of Ulaanbaatar, launched a major project to document the environmental and health impacts of the Baganuur coal mine. The mine extracts some 2.5 million tons of coal every year, most of which is sent to Ulaanbaatar which relies on the mine for 70 percent of its coal. (<http://arcworld.org>)

The project, supported by the World Bank's NEMO fund, (NEMO = Netherlands-Mongolia

Trust Fund for Environmental Reform) was a response to the suspicion that the mine's operations were impacting seriously on residents' health, as well as that of the miners. Baganuur mine is indeed having a significant negative effect on local residents' health, as well as the health of the local environment. The fine particles of coal dust, the high content of heavy metals found in Baganuur coal and the chemical elements emitted during the mining process are impacting upon local

residents' health. The mine's impact extends to Ulaanbaatar where the coal is consumed. (<http://arcworld.org>)

Recommendations ranged from introducing coal detoxification mechanisms in the mine itself to setting up an information centre in the city, adding Buddhist teachings on conservation onto school curriculum, and teaching some practical solutions for miners and their families to reduce the toxic effects of coal at a household level. (www.arcworld.org) Handbook.pdf

There are currently 16 monks and eight support staff at Onstar Isei Lin Monastery, which was built in 1996, and then re-opened under its present name in 2003. It contains the Zana Agvaanbaldan Research Centre, set up jointly with the Mongolian National University's Department of Buddhist Studies, with the mission of disseminating religious knowledge to a lay public and sustaining its religious activities. (www.arcworld.org) Handbook.pdf

4. Ecological Experience in Contemporary Thailand

During 1945 to 1975, forest cover area in Thailand reduced from 61% to 34% of the country's land, which alerted the people for Ecological conservation. In 1975, Phrakru Pitak Nanthakun, a Buddhist monk, initiated to promote forest protection through ordination of trees in his home village Kew Muang in the Northern Thai Province of Nan. He was called as "Ecology monks" (Phra Nak Anuruksa). To accelerate his mission he founded the Kew Muang Conservation Club in his home village. In course of time he extended his conservation efforts to other villages as well. (Darlington, Susan M, 1998: 1-15)

Phrakru Manas Natheepitak, the abbot of Wat Baddhana, also adopted the traditional monk ordination ritual to ordinate the trees for their protection. It was a successful effort to stop logging near his forest temple in Northern Thailand. With the success of Phrakru Manas's efforts to protect the forest, the practice of ordaining trees had become popular.

Because of the industrial and urban waste, the river Nan became polluted. In 1992, Phrakhrui Pitak formed the Hag Muang Nan Group to protect the river from pollution. In 1993, he organized a ritual for blessing the Nan River, which led to the

creation of a fish sanctuary in a certain segment of the river. (Karitbunyarit, Arawan, 1993)

Although the number of ecology monks (Phra Nak Anuruksa), is small, their impact on society is very significant. The Thai Buddhist considered monasteries environmental issues as the part of their religious duty to be free from suffering. (Sanitsuda, Ekachai : 72–83)

Based on Buddhist principles and practices, the Ecological Monks adapted traditional rituals and ceremonies to draw attention of the people towards the environmental problems, to raise awareness about the value of nature and to inspire people to take part in conservation efforts. In the Tree Ordination Rituals (Buat ton mai), the trees are blessed and wrapped in the saffron robes to signify their sacred status, (Darlington, Susan M, 1997 : 17-20) which helps in the protection of environmental conservation a lot in Thailand.

Monk Phrakru Pitak Nanthakun, Phrakru Manas Natheepitak, and Phrakru Prajak Huttajitto, made a wide variety of efforts on grassroot level to popularize the conservation initiatives including tree ordination, planting ceremony, the establishment of the wildlife sanctuaries, long life ceremonies for ecologically threatened sites and initiating the sustainable community development and natural farming. Ecological Monks took stands against deforestation, shrimp farming, and dam and pipeline construction for cash crops. Phrakhru Pitak and his Non-governmental Organization Hag Muang Nan Group (Love Nan Group) coordinated with the Environmental agencies and other NGOs in his home province of Nan. He became a respected leader of Thai society. (Darlington, Susan M, 1997: 17-20)

The centrality of the temple in Thai village-life makes the conservation efforts of rural monks more effective. Credit for protecting some of the last remaining natural forests goes to ecological minded abbots of the forest monasteries in Thailand.

Thus, we can say that the Buddhist Monks have realized the seriousness of the Ecological problem, and have tried their best to handle it. Though, they are in different countries, and have no direct contact with each other, they have contributed for a common goal, i.e. to make this earth clean, pollution free and safe for next generations.

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