

## Environmental Consciousness in Buddhism

**\*Dr. Meeta Garg**

In recent years, people who follow and give regard to the Buddhist philosophy have been turning towards nature. This paper aims to map that environmental consciousness in the teachings of Buddha. The Buddhist teachings that call for Karuna, Maity, Maitri and similar feelings actually inspire mankind to be thoughtful of all our surroundings. And when we start being conscious of our surroundings we start thinking about the well being of all. This leads to thought about not damaging the trees unnecessarily, not harming animals and birds, insects and all other living organisms besides man.

Buddhists tend to live in harmony with nature as they acknowledge the interdependence of all organic life. Buddhists try and work towards making themselves aware of the loss they cause to the environment and try not to do so. They try to change their ways, they try to use minimal resources and try to give back to nature what they consume. They believe that people need to live a simple life and respect the cycle and balance in nature so everything can continue for future generations. A degraded environment ultimately affects human life and vice versa. Therefore environmental protection is the need of today for the benefit of humans as well as environment.<sup>1</sup>

Adherents of Buddhism believe that our inner and outer environment are actually closely linked. They are one and inseparable. According to their principle of - Oneness of Life and Environment, man can reform his environment through innerchanges. It is believed that our inner state of being is reflected in our outside environment. Infact it is manifested in our outside environment. This environment includes not only nature but also our relationships with people around us. If we are feeling joyful that state will also be reflected in our environment. And if our general tendency is compassion, it is believed that the environment supports us.<sup>2</sup>

Some Jataka tales too give valuable lessons on environment like the fable of the tortoise who did not leave his riverbed inspite of the failed monsoon. Ultimately the river dried and the tortoise was scooped out of the mud by potters who came there for collecting mud for making pots. The tale is a reflection on the drastic results of overuse, overconsumption and the impending weather change. Another tale about Chhaddantta, the white elephant, is a story of self - sacrifice and empathy. It also implores the reader to give respect to all, to be empathetic towards all and the consequences of ego.<sup>3</sup>

The Eightfold path of Buddhism is another way of teaching nature consciousness to people. Each of its principles is relevant to nature because they teach non- violence, compassion and loving

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kindness towards all. In a discourse on loving kindness, it is wished - Let all creatures be happy minded whether they move or are still, whether large or small, whether seen or unseen and so on. Then the path of Ahimsa- or non injury to all, Karuna- compassion for all also lead to the same way of life. Infact the buddhists go on to believe that happiness is to be found in restraining desire, in living a life of contentment rather than in running after fulfilling all desires.<sup>4</sup>

Thus it can be seen that the Buddhist philosophy holds great lessons for environment. It goes on to prove that man can be happy only by taking care of his environment as the inner and outer world are interconnected. These and such other teachings lovingly profess the need of environmental protection. Taking this message we should wake up so that any further environmental damage can be checked and reversed.

**\*Department of History  
Government PG College  
Dausa (Raj.)**

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