

Compatibility of Buddhist principles and Ecology

Dr. Indu Girish (*)

Growth is the essence of life, all life - humans grow, saplings grow into trees and into whole forests, buds grow into flowers, animals grow; mostly, each entity, living or manmade, pursues growth in various forms and names - growth, development, expansion, increase, progress, advancement, etc. – it may be economic growth, industrial progress, technological advancement, development of nations, expansion of markets and so forth. And how should this progress come? Fast! All our effort goes into thinking how to accelerate growth? How to speed up progress? People want faster technology, speedier processes, quicker results, but at what cost? Does this frenzied pace necessarily have to lead growth through an unbalanced path that culminates in tribulation and crisis? Can't the path of development be charted with a little more care, judiciousness, justice and also concern for future generations? Does the pursuit of wealth and comfort have to blind us to its side effects and the direction in which they are taking our life and the whole planet? Can we really afford such a myopic view that we cannot discern the

long-term destruction we stand to face, the suffering the whole planet stands to face?

The celebration of the great day of Vesak is to commemorate the birth, enlightenment and the Mahaparinibbana of the Buddha, the enlightened one, who lived for the deliverance of humankind from the darkness of ignorance, greed and hatred; and at this very celebration, almost two and a half millennia later, the humankind, now facing an acute environmental crisis tries to explain the origin of the crisis and the degeneration that has followed, and seeks deliverance through the Buddha's timeless teachings, searching for ways to make growth more balanced, sustainable and ecologically sound. There is a growing realisation that the present crisis is not merely environmental but is multi-dimensional with economic and socio-political facets and more significantly, is a manifestation of the deeper intellectual, moral and spiritual crisis.

In the past few years, the concerns of ecological sustainability, ecological security, etc have taken centre-stage owing to the magnitude and urgency of the looming crisis. Ecology, the scientific study of relationships and interactions among organisms and with the biotic and abiotic elements of their environment, is more than only a discipline of natural sciences. It is also referred to as 'the science of balance of nature'. In more than three billion years of evolution, the various ecosystems of our planet have organized themselves in very subtle and complex ways. Nature's ecosystems are essentially sustainable communities of plants, animals and other organisms. The most outstanding characteristic of the biosphere is its inherent ability to sustain life in all its myriad forms. So a sustainable human community must be designed in such a manner that its way of life, its physical structures, businesses, economy, polity, etc., do not interfere with nature's inherent ability to sustain life.

The United Nations explains "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising

the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.¹ Twenty years ago, Lester Brown, President of the Worldwatch Institute in Washington DC similarly described a sustainable society as one that is able to satisfy its needs without diminishing the chances of future generations. Hence, sustainability means improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting eco-systems. It is a state of being with an entire web of relationships and implies community acting in concert.

The clash between economics and ecology arises from the fact that whereas Nature is cyclical, the industrial and commercial systems fuelling our present day economy are entirely linear. Human businesses take resources, transform them into products plus waste, and sell the products to consumers, who generate more waste in the act of consuming the products. Corporate entities treat natural resources such as air, water and soil as free commodities and also disregard the delicate web of social factors. Private profit is then made at public cost, especially in terms of deterioration of the environment and the general quality of life, which is also at the expense of the future generations. Such a set up cannot possibly be sustainable. Development demands resources and Nature is incontrovertibly the primary provider of all the various resources on which all our economic and developmental activity is based. For this development to be sustainable, it must rest on secure ecological foundations.

Technology is described as the knowledge of manipulation of nature for human purposes i.e., to meet the demands of development. In its early history and until comparatively recent times, the human capacity for such manipulation was limited to micro-level changes from which Nature could quickly recover. But the double-edged sword of scientific power and technology has equipped us with greater manipulative capability. As this anthropogenic interference and manipulation increase exponentially and become more indiscriminate in order to cater to the demands of an expanding

1. 'Our Common Future', report released by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987.

population that are surpassing the sustainable yield of eco-systems, they result in more destruction. In other words, the humankind and its economy are progressively destroying their own support systems. And to what end? Economic or industrial development is meant to create wealth, raise the quality of our life and supposedly make the world richer. When with every breath we inhale more toxins than oxygen, we cannot sate our thirst without drinking in the pollutants that have permeated all our waters, we cannot get a fruit free of chemicals to eat, how better off are we? Have we really grown richer? Or are we actually poorer?

Nature has borne the brunt of human imprudence and the consequences are being suffered in the form of global warming, alarming climate changes, desertification due to deforestation, loss of biodiversity, floods, droughts and famines, changes in global water cycle, rise in the global mean sea level, and so forth. The greatest risk that confronts us now is that of climate change. The very recent instance of extreme conditions of frost faced by the United States of America, Canada, and Mexico in January 2014 has been unprecedented in over a century and are also being attributed to anthropogenic climate change resulting from global warming.

Our Earth becomes habitable by the warming effect produced by the naturally occurring amounts of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and climatic variability, until modern times, has been brought about mainly by natural causes. But the source of our concern is the dangerously overwhelming anthropogenic interference i.e., human impact on climate change, the rapid pace of change and the crisis born thereof which is threatening the humans as much as the other species. If we fail to prevent the runaway climate change, the earth will not disappear; we will.

The findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its fourth assessment (AR4, 2007) informs us that scientists were more than 90% (revised to 95% in 2013) certain that most of global warming was being caused by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases produced by human activities. It clearly observed:

global atmospheric concentrations of CO₂, methane and nitrous oxide have increased markedly as a result of human activities since 1750 and now far exceed pre-industrial values. The global greenhouse gas emissions have increased 70% between 1970 and 2004.² In 2013, the IPCC has reported: Human influence has been detected in warming of the atmosphere and the ocean, in changes in the global water cycle, in reductions in snow and ice, in global mean sea level rise, and in changes in some climate extremes. This evidence for human influence has grown since AR4.

The IPCC has projected a marked increase in global warming over the 21st century. The effects of an increase in global temperature include a rise in sea levels and a change in the amount and pattern of precipitation, as well as a probable expansion of deserts. Warming is expected to be strongest in the Arctic, with the continuing retreat of glaciers and sea ice. Other likely effects of the warming include more frequent extreme weather events including heat waves, droughts and heavy rainfall; ocean acidification; and species extinctions. Effects more directly significant to humans include the threat to food security from decreasing crop yields and the loss of habitat from inundation.

In cognizance of its crucial importance, environmental sustainability is now among the United Nation's Millennium Development goals, a list of eight international development objectives and 18 targets, aiming to integrate principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs, reverse the loss of environmental resources and reduce the loss of biodiversity significantly. In addition, it also seeks to halve the proportion of population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015, as well as achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. While the problem is environmental, the response has to come from all arenas of activity, whether economic

2. IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007

or non-economic, governmental as well as individual. The idea of environmental protection and conservation must be seeded in the minds of individuals, communities and nations, of which action would be born. Only then, it can be expected to become a way of life. Legislation alone will be fruitless in absence of awareness and education of ethics, environmental ethics in particular.

Religion cannot offer a direct technological solution to these problems but it steers people's thinking towards appreciating the gravity of the situation and stimulates them into conscious action, adoption of prudent greener practices, attitudes, and virtues. Religion and ethics have motivational power that can kindle an "ecological conscience" in the masses.

Buddhism, a path of profound wisdom and realism, of balance and compassion, of enlightenment and welfare is the way that has been shown to us two and a half millennia ago. Buddhist philosophy seeks to address the environmental concerns by striving to reach the core of the human ethical moral crisis and heal, by focusing on the mind, by effecting a change in human thinking that is the root of all our action, by correcting our misplaced reasoning of right and wrong, by analyzing methods that lend control over human activities such as changes in values and lifestyle, examining environmental ethics. There is a saying in Buddhism that "the Bodhisattvas fear causes, whereas ordinary people fear consequences".

The above considerations indicate that Buddhism can be a strong guiding force and an effective source of knowledge for environmental solutions. It lends us that vision which is of greater essence than any legislation, natural science or technology. My endeavour in this paper is to identify the significance of the role of various Buddhist Principles in environmental preservation and restoration.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The ecological crisis is a wider manifestation of the Buddhist notion of Dukkha (suffering).

The first Noble Truth i.e., ‘suffering’, applies in the context of environment with recognition of the fundamental contemporary reality that environmental crisis is ‘suffering’ for humanity resulting from deliberate human acts that have damaged the environment and upset the delicate ecological balance.

The second Noble Truth i.e., ‘the origin of suffering’ may be understood in terms of the unwholesome roots of greed (lobha), hatred (dosa) and the cognitive root of delusion (moha). The Buddha believed that the root cause of all evils are greed, hatred (anger) and ignorance. Greed provides a strong base for the insatiable desires to acquire and accumulate material pleasures, competitiveness, and all the fuel necessary for a society dominated by excessive consumerism. This leads to lack of concern for other humans, future generations and other living creatures. The root hatred (dosa) generates emotions of anger and resentment along with the drive for aggressive pursuits. It is lack of love, empathy and care, so well described in the *Agañña Sutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya* (III, 80-98). To add to greed and aggression, there is ignorance (avidyā), which is lack of understanding of this predicament, as well as a strong anthropocentrism, which in Buddhist terms is an expression of a deep-seated egocentric perspective.

Hence, according to the Buddhist ecological point of view, whatever crises we are undergoing, pertaining to the social environment or the ecological environment is conditioned by our own mind. These unwholesome roots remain a perennial basis of suffering and foster such an economic and technological system that has enabled the human species to dominate Nature.

Elimination of the above-mentioned three evil roots can lead us to liberation i.e., ‘cessation of suffering’. The message of the third Noble Truth by the Buddha with respect to environment, therefore, is: people do not understand that the essence of ecology is not only the physical cleaning of the polluted environment but something deeper – re-establishing the balance between humans and Nature. Hence environmental cleansing, preservation and protection

can cease the suffering born out of the environmental crisis by restoration of this balance.

The fourth Noble Truth i.e., ‘the way leading to the cessation of suffering’ is the way or the Buddhist approach that can help in solving the global ecological crisis.

Compassion (*karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*) are the basis for a balanced view of the whole world including environment. The *Karaṇīyamettā Sutta* enjoins the cultivation of loving-kindness towards all creatures. Just as one’s own life is precious to oneself, so is the other’s life precious to him/her. Therefore, a reverential attitude must be cultivated towards all forms of life.³

The use of the ‘save and not waste’ approach which means judicious use of natural resources; mindless destruction upsets the vital balance of life.

Ecology can be rebuilt through the philosophy of *Sarvodaya* i.e., uplift of all and respect for all.

In the contemporary world, Buddhist monastic communities are developing new ways of applying ancient Buddhist principles to their own environments.

The Eight Fold path also teaches active participation in efforts of restoring, protecting, preserving and nurturing the living environment. Right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration are the precepts which when sincerely followed would make us see and rectify our wrongdoing of the past and help preclude it in future, leading us to see right, judge right, decide right and act right. Right thought (wisdom) is the key to transforming the mind and in turn actions. As it has been rightly stated in the *Dhammapada*-

We are what we think

3. De Silva, Lily – Buddhist Attitude Towards Nature

All that we are, arises with our thoughts

With our thoughts we make the world.⁴

As the mind gets purified, so do actions. Thus, the mental attitude not in tune with nature disappears and new mental states lead to more enlightened actions in relation to nature.

For example: in the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, monks, nuns and lay people are getting involved in recycling; in teaching temple residents and the supporters of temples not to pollute the air, earth and water; and in reforesting temple properties while also performing the ancient Buddhist practice of rescuing birds and animals originally consigned to death and liberating them; they are developing new ecologic concern for making sure that those sentient beings are released into suitable habitats. The principle of compassionate ecology is also being taught in the Association's Buddhist schools.

It would also be apt to cite the example of Deep ecology here which is one of Engaged Buddhism's major contributions towards environmental conservation. Drawing on the principle of dependent origination and the idea of a broader self, its practices have shown positive results.

THEORY OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

The concept of interdependence is the most important source in the teachings of the Buddha, which is often cited as compatible between Buddhism and ecological perspective. This concept also known as 'dependent origination' means that everything comes into being through a process of causes and conditions which has been caused and in turn causes and conditions other things. Existence is thus a great web of interdependence and interconnectedness in which it is incorrect to think of things in isolation from each other.

Today, the environment experts and ecologists agree that the earth

4. Dhammapada 1, verse 2

is a very delicately balanced system of interdependent parts. An environment is conceived as a natural and social system in which humans and other organisms live and from which they draw their sustenance.⁵

This interconnectedness between man and Nature is described in the Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta (Dn III, 58-77). The theme of this sermon on “War, Wickedness and Wealth” is to underscore the lawful nature of the law of dependent arising, where moral order reigns supreme. When people tread the immoral paths of life through greed, famine is a natural consequence; when morals degenerate due to ignorance, epidemics result; and when anger and hatred emerge, the way of violence replaces a lawful way of life. It is also said that as the realization of immoral roots of their predicament dawns on people, there is a change of heart and they begin to enjoy economic prosperity, good quality of life, and a longer life. Thus greed, hatred, and ignorance that pollute the mind also pollute the environment. The significance of this sutta lies in the importance on the rule of law which must be respected by a “wheel turning king”. The later commentaries have structured this notion in the form of five natural laws: (*utuniyāma*) law of seasons, (*bīja-niyāma*) law of the seeds, (*cittaniyāma*) the laws of the mind, (*kammaniyāma*) moral law and (*dhammaniyāma*) the lawful nature of phenomena. These cover the physical, biological, psychological and moral laws and the very nature of laws that govern all phenomena. If humans follow these laws, they have the potential to live in harmony with nature. By exploring the theory of dependent origination, we get a broader cosmic setting to understand human behavior and its effects on the environment.

Buddhist environmental ethics can be observed through the practical application of its tenet of ‘*asmin sati idam hoti*’ – this being that arises, through the ceasing of this, that ceases. According to this

5. De Silva, Padmasiri – Buddhism, Ethics and Society- the conflicts and dilemmas of our time, Monash Asia Institute, Clayton, Australia.

causal process of dependent origination, with regard to environment, it can be stated in line with the traditional formula – because of sense desire there arises consumerism, because of consumerism there arises commodity production, because of commodity production there arises resource extraction, because of resource extraction there happens green-house gas emission and because of green-house gas emission there arises climate change and thus the ‘suffering’ comes to be on account of sense desire, just because of sense desire.

This identification of the cause points our sight towards the sole possible solution. Most solutions hitherto proposed or employed fall short or defeat their very purpose since they do not focus on the actual cause. There is an extensive pursuit of ways and means to satisfy our sense desires without hurting the environment which, in the end, is a vain attempt. That today’s society is over-indulgent, wasteful and improvident in use of resources, basically stems from our value system which is based on finding happiness by pleasing the senses. The underlying issue is not how we produce things, but that we are consuming and thus producing beyond what is essential to sustain physical health and well being.

Solutions could be discovered, not in altering the means of doing the same things but in ways to do with little. This would call for a fundamental change in our value system, which would mean finding happiness which is not dependent on indulgence or consumption of resources. This is where religion, especially monastic traditions could make a contribution. Buddhism guides us to find the real happiness within. The Buddha praised ‘jhāna’ (meditation) as the ultimate happiness exclusive of sense pleasures. An important virtue to be cultivated is ‘santutṭhi’ or contentment with little. This virtue, if absorbed, provides contentment without looking for the transitory happiness derived from sense pleasures. This contribution of monastic communities would be greatly beneficial to the world at this time of crisis.

Thus, exerting control over greed and learning to live in accordance with our place in the natural world, and re-connecting with the inter-

dependent web which we are a part of – both these measures would help make this world a better place.

THEORY OF NO-SELF

One of the applications of this principle of Dependent Origination is the explication of the Buddhist teaching of ‘no-self’ which means that there is no eternal substance like ‘soul’ in the body and even other entities of the empirical world do not have any intrinsic core as everything is in a flux or a continuous flow, changing every moment. The absence of any real self substance amounts to accepting everyone as equal. Hence, in the context of environment it can be stated that – ‘no one of us is the centre of the Universe.’ From the Buddhist point of view, humans are not a category distinct or separate from other sentient beings, nor are they intrinsically superior. All sentient beings are considered equal.

To see things in an instrumental way i.e., to see things always in their usefulness to oneself is an egocentric perspective. The fact that most of us view things in this perspective only and treat non-sentient beings as objects for human consumption is simply a manifestation of our fundamental ignorance.

We cannot deny the instrumental value in general because we constantly draw upon many things in order to live. So far as we do not over-exploit the Nature to satiate our greed, an instrumental regard of Nature is not bad. It is in fact the source of high regard and esteem in Buddhism.

There is a great regard for the ‘Bo tree’ beneath which the Buddha attained enlightenment; the Buddha himself showed gratitude to the tree that provided him shelter in his striving for enlightenment. Nature as wilderness or forest has been highly regarded as it provides unspoiled natural locations ideal for the progress in the Buddhist practice of self-cultivation. The Buddha’s discourses guide monks to dwell in the solitude and quietude of the forest, to go to the root of the tree and empty places of Nature. However, to develop oneness

with Nature in those surroundings, one must enter the forest leaving behind lust, attachment, aggressive impulses, fear and doubt and this way his mind and heart will not be disturbed by the rustling of the wind, falling of the leaves, or movement of a peacock.

At the same time, in Buddhism things are also seen as having an intrinsic value – that is they have value in themselves, ‘just as they are’, with no reference to their usefulness for others. The teachings of the Buddha entail the sanctity of all forms of life. The Vinaya Pīṭaka states – ‘it is an offence to sprinkle water on the ground, if it is known that there are living creatures that will be harmed by this act.’⁶ This can also be seen by the importance accorded by the Buddha to the Nature and environment that he readily agreed to lay down a rule that fully ordained monks should abstain from harming all plants and trees and a transgression of this rule as a ‘pācittiya offence’ – *bhijāgāma bhūtagāma samārambhā pātivirati hoti*⁷. The monks and nuns are expected to be cautious of even unintentional harm to living creatures. They were expected not to travel during rainy season as they might be destroying new shoots and plants and be conscious of injury to worms and minute creatures which come up to the surface during rainy season.⁸ Buddha was also concerned with the unintentional destruction in digging, cutting down trees and destroying vegetable growth.⁹ Buddha was also not in favour pursuing the profession of slaughtering and fishing by the lay people (sammā ājīva).

Thus, we see that Buddhist practice takes both the perspectives in equal consideration i.e., recognizing things both in their instrumental value as well as intrinsic value. Such a perspective can ideally be explained in terms of ‘Tathatā’, ‘suchness’ or ‘thusness’ of things i.e., the right attitude towards natural environment is understanding the ‘Nature as it is’ - *Yathābhūtanandassana*

6. Vinaya II.7.

7. Dn. Vol 1. Sāmaññaphala Sutta, Nalanda Edition, 1956

8. Vinaya I, 137

9. Vinaya IV, 34; I, 137, 138; IV, 296; IV, 32, 33; IV, 49, 125

EQUAL REGARD FOR SENTIENT BEINGS

Mahāyāna and Theravāda both recognize the animals as sentient beings i.e., beings that have awareness and can suffer. Since both humans and animals are sentient beings revolving together in the repeated births throughout the saṃsāra, this understanding inculcates a feeling of closeness towards the animal world and develops an awareness that we are not fundamentally different from animals.

Having developed such an awareness that animals too suffer, Buddhism clearly states that it is not good for any sentient being to suffer and one should avoid causing such suffering and try to relieve it when it exists. Thus, the first Buddhist precept for lay disciples strongly urges to avoid killing, harming or causing suffering to any sentient being which includes humans as well as animals. Buddha condemned the infliction of pain on living creatures.¹⁰ This perhaps seems to be the major reason that the Buddha opposed the sacrificial rituals performed during the Vedic period in which innocent animals were being slaughtered. An equally important reason was the destruction of trees as the tree-trunks were required for the proper performance of the sacrificial event. The Kūṭadanta Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya¹¹ condemns this wanton destruction of Nature in the name of sacrifice to Gods.

Hence, basic to the Buddhist ethics is not to harm animals and have compassion for all sentient beings, without making a distinction among those having two, four or no legs. Hence, Sn expresses the feelings of the Buddha in the following way -

*Whatever breathing beings there may be,
No matter they are frail or firm
With none excepted, be they long or big
Or middle sized, or be they short or small
Or thick, as well as seen or unseen
Or whether they are dwelling far or near*

10. Pāṇātipāta Veramaṇi Sikkhāpadaṃ Samādiyāmi

11. Dn – vol II, pp 173-185 PTS, London

*Existing or yet seeking to exist
May beings all be of a blissful heart.*¹²

NON-DUALISM

Mahāyāna Buddhism strongly develops the idea of ‘non-dualism’ in its philosophy, which means ‘free from the duality of extremes’. But taken in its linguistic sense, ‘non-dualism’ means ‘not two’ and this is reflected in the concept of Śūnyatā or emptiness. Śūnyatā means that all the things are dependent on certain causes and conditions (dependent origination) for their origination hence they do not have a self-existent nature of their own and are devoid of independent existence, consequently they are Śūnya. Since all things are devoid of their independent existence, this way of thinking ultimately leads to the erasure of all boundaries as ‘humans’ or ‘plants’ or ‘animals’ etc. and acknowledges an all-encompassing attitude towards a unifying whole without distinctions.

Closely knit with this idea is the second principle of deep ecology which Arne Naess has referred to as ‘self-realization’. By this he means identification with others or ‘seeing something of oneself in others’. It is the realization of a broader self which includes all beings, all animals, all biota and the entire natural world. It is a realization that mankind is a part of the earth, not separate from it.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The importance of man’s indispensable symbiotic relationship with Nature cannot possibly be undermined. Buddhism inherently includes concern and care for Nature as a way of life, encouraging proactive effort with a view to cultivating harmony between man and Nature and not wait for a crisis to happen for man to seek solutions in these timeless teachings. It does not preach indifference towards the surrounding environment. The Buddha stressed on the need to preserve environment and to this end laid down pertinent rules too.

12. Sn. V, 143-52

In order to maintain equilibrium the humankind must conserve and nurture environment and ensure that its acts do not cause damage to the surroundings, for its own good. It plays a role both curative and preventive in the present scenario.

Since all our actions originate in our mind, Buddhist thought and practices try to stimulate the transformation of the human mind and thus his/her actions, bringing our thoughts from selfishness to compassion for all sentient beings, from indulgence to control, and from excesses to balance. The real happiness, Buddhism holds, has to be uncovered within and must not be confused with the transitory happiness that we strive to find through indulgence and over-consumption. This transformation has to precede any kind of activism regarding environmental issues. The drive has to begin with reforming our own selves before extending it to the world, inducing the sense of interconnectedness.

“ It is forgotten that not our world, but we human beings are the causes of our problems, and only by re-designing our thinking and acting, not the world around us, can we solve them.” (Lazlo 1978)

The Buddhist ethical code essentially consists of precepts (as part of the Eight Fold Path) that uphold the sanctity of life viz., right ethical conduct (*Śīla*), practice of concentration (*Samādhi*). and development of wisdom (*Paññā*).¹³ They are not merely rules to be adhered to but it is the underlying purification of mind and development of character that are of essence. The Buddha also emphasized on pure natural environment for spiritual upliftment.

We find a classic discourse of the Buddha which says – ‘when the monk receives new robes, the old robes are not to be completely discarded, but to be used as coverlets, when they are old they are to be converted into mattress covers; old mattress covers are to be used as rugs, rugs into dusters and even the tattered dusters are to be

13. *Śīla* – right speech, right action, right livelihood.

Samādhi – right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration

Paññā - right view, right thought

put together with clay and be used for repairing cracks on the floor and walls.’ (Vinay II;291). Similarly, the householder is expected to collect wealth for his needs in the way that a bee collects honey without injuring the flower (Dn III, 189). Thriftiness, generosity, caring, sharing, industriousness and earning by the “sweat of one’s brow”, they all form a rich tapestry of a simple and contented life (de Silva, 1998, 156).

Such references exhibit not the attitude of being miserly but of exemplary judiciousness and mindfulness in the use of available resources. This attitude of thrift, sharing, industriousness and earning by sweat brings about reduction in wastefulness and a more careful utilization of resources, eventually contributing towards preventing undue exploitation and wastage of nature’s reserves.

The Buddhist spirit of environmentalism can be clearly seen in the aspirations expressed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, of developing Tibet into a zone of Ahimsā (non-violence) – “the Tibetan plateau would be transformed into the world’s largest natural park or biosphere. Strict laws would be enforced to protect wildlife and plant life; the exploitation of natural resources would be carefully regulated so as not to damage relevant ecosystems; and a policy of sustainable development would be adopted in populated areas” (H.H. The 14th Dalai Lama, Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1989). The Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh also advocates the same spirit for the future conservation of the environment. He says: we should deal in nature in the way we should deal with ourselves! We should not harm ourselves; we should not harm nature. Harming nature is harming ourselves, and vice versa. If we knew how to deal with ourselves and fellow human beings, we would know how to deal with nature. Therefore by not caring for anyone of these, we harm them all (Hanh, 1988, in Epstein, 1988, 40-46).

Problems surface when economic profit outweighs moral and social concerns as the most influential motivator. So long as the economic activities are not filled with the unwholesome roots of greed and ignorance, we can cultivate the wisdom to see the intrinsic value

of things around us besides their instrumental value and develop a holistic vision to promote “ecological sensibility” and work towards sustainability.

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