

ATTITUDES OF THE ARAHANTS (ENLIGHTENED ONES) IN BUDDHISM TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

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We are living in a materially developed world with amazing technological advancements. However, people are facing environmental crises that cannot be easily solved, than in any other period of human history. The environmental problems that the world faces today are unprecedented in the history of our mankind. Air pollution, water depletion, deforestation, land degradation, loss of biodiversity and climate changes are some of the grave environmental crises that reflect this state of affairs. There are many conative factors that generate environmental problems. Average people are always trying to satisfy their desires without any consideration of the world around them. With the scientific and technological development, modern large-scale industries have advanced with such incredible productive capacity that they supply much more goods and services than the real demand. That proves to be environmentally disastrous. They consume much of the non-renewable resources of the world that took millions of years to form and which could satisfy the needs of many more generations to come if wisely used. In this context Schumacher (1974), in his book titled 'Small is Beautiful' quotes the thoughts of Gandhi in the following way: "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need; but not for every man's greed." Using this is a starting point; an attempt is made have to explore the attitudes of the *Arahants* in Buddhism for a better environmental condition.

The highest moral state in Buddhism is formed among those who attained to the Nibbāna, the final goal of Buddhism. Those who attained to this state are known as *arahants*. The term '*Arahant*' is derived from the root *arh*, 'to be worthy' or 'deserve'. Horner (1936) analyzes the following four *Pāli* forms of

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the noun: *arahā*, *arahat*, *arahant*, and *arahan*. It is also be used as a verb, which in *Pāli* turns out to be *arahati*, ‘to be worthy’. Etymologically, then, the *arahant* is a noble person of highest spiritual caliber. Conze states that “The ideal man, the saint or sage at the highest stage of development is called an ‘*arahant*’. The Buddhists themselves often interest the word ‘*arahant*’ from the combination of two words ‘Ari’ which means ‘enemy’ and ‘han’ which means ‘to destroy’. So that an *arahant* would be ‘A destroyer of the foe’, the foes have referring to the passions. Those noble disciples of the Buddha become disenchanted with material form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness. Being disenchanted, they become dispassionate. Such kinds of persons are the ideal human beings who epitomized the highest aspirations of man-kind. They cannot harm anyone or anything like other ordinary people who wet with greed and selfishness.

According to Buddhism, main reason for all kinds of problems whatever internal or external is unwholesome thoughts occurring in man’s mind. The *Aggañña sutta* which relates the episode of the evolution of the world and society emphasizes the fact that moral degeneration of man causes the degradation of his personality as well as environment. Another discourse in the *Anguttarnikāya*, when lust, greed and perverse grip the heart of man and immorality becomes widespread in society, weather patterns get disrupted. Then seasonal rain fails crops and induces the spread of diseases.

The concept of interdependence of man and nature is systematized in the theory of the five cosmic laws (*pañca niyāma dhamma*). The five cosmic laws are:

1. physical laws (*utu niyāma*)
2. biological laws (*bīja niyāma*)
3. psychological laws (*citta niyāma*)
4. moral laws (*kamma niyāma*)
5. causal laws (*dhamma niyāma*)

When one probes further, one can obtain a deeper understanding of how those five cosmic laws interdependently help for the existence and continuity of the universe. The morals of man influence not only the psychological

make-up of the people, but also the biological and physical environment of an area as well. These cosmic laws demonstrate that man and nature are bound together in a reciprocal causal relationship with changes in one necessarily bringing about changes in the other.

In the *Dhammapada* the 'vana' or forest has been used by the Buddha as a dual meaning word which can be meaningfully applied in the present world context.

"Vanam chindatha mā rukkham – vanato jāyati bhayam"

Cut down the forest of passion but not real trees. From the forest of passions brings fear. The present world is engaged in cutting down trees thereby eliminating 'natural forests'. What would be ideal is to cut down the 'forest of passions' within oneself, which keep on hindering one's intellectual and spiritual progress. When passions are cut down, one would not think of cutting down individual trees in a forest of trees; it is the passionate desire that drives one to cut down trees.

According to the Buddhist tradition, enlightened persons show friendly attitudes to the forest environment. *Arananta vagga* of the *Dhammapada* provides one of the best accounts. The following expressions are good examples that reflect the eco-friendly nature of the enlightened persons.

"The mindful ones exert themselves (to attain enlightenment). They are not attached to any home or dwelling place. Like swans that abandon the lake, they leave home after home".

"Delightful are the forests where worldly men delight not; the passionless will rejoice (therein), (for) they seek no sensual pleasure".

Thera gāṭā, the collection of verses expressed or composed by the enlightened persons who belong to the early period is full of descriptions of nature and environment. The deep appreciation of nature can be seen in some of them, could be regarded as the best of natural serenity experienced by them. The verse sung by *arahant Sappaka* is a good example:

"When cranes with clear bright wings, terrified by the black clouds, flee to shelter, then the river *Ajakarani* delights me".

Many enlightened ones speak of forest, birds and beasts, flowing rivers and water dripping down mountain slopes with a deep pleasant attitude. *Thālapuṭa thera* contemplates in this manner:

“In a cave and on a mountain crest, frequented and plunged into by wild boars and antelopes or on a naturally pleasant place or in a grove rain sprinkled with fresh water, one will rejoice there in ones cave house”.

Those verses really expose how enlightened persons spent their lives in the natural environment without any disturbance to it. As dispassionate ones, they experience natural beauty in the true sense of the meaning. Although they rejoice in natural beauty, they do not try to possess it or harm it. That is the difference between ordinary people and the enlightened persons.

The life philosophy of an enlightened person was to live rather than ‘to have’ or ‘to possess’. Such exalted mental state can be attained through the real understanding of the nature of life. As a result of eradicating all kinds of passions, the enlightened persons cannot and do not possess any kinds of unwholesome thoughts. Such a person does not do any harmful things to the living and non-living environment. In this way we can say that we can only secure environment with attitudinal changes.

Keywords: Enlightened persons, environment, morality, dispassion, natural beauty

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