



# Buddhism and Nature Conservation: An Insight from the Pali Tipitaka

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## **Abstract**

Humanity relies on nature for essential resources such as food, shelter, and medicine. However, excessive exploitation driven by consumerism and greed has led to severe environmental crises. Buddhism, with its emphasis on ethics and mindfulness, provides valuable insights into environmental conservation. Although the Buddha did not explicitly address pollution, early Buddhist texts in the Pāli Tipiṭaka highlight the deep connection between human morality and nature. The Aggañña Sutta illustrates how moral decline leads to environmental degradation, while the Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta warns of the dangers of excessive greed. Fundamental Buddhist principles, such as impermanence (aniccā) and the five natural laws (pañca niyāmadhammā), emphasize the relationship between moral actions and natural processes. The teachings of contentment (santutthī) and non-violence (ahiṃsā) further encourage a respectful and sustainable relationship with nature. The Pāli canon also stresses the importance of flora and fauna. The Five Precepts advocate compassion towards animals and plants, while the Karaniyamettā Sutta promotes loving-kindness (mettā) toward all beings. Buddhist scriptures, including the Dhammapada and Simsapā Sutta, use nature-based similes to reinforce environmental ethics. Buddhist monastic discipline strictly prohibits harming plants and animals, advocating for a sustainable lifestyle. The Vinaya Piṭaka emphasizes environmental purity, including water conservation. Furthermore, Buddhist governance, as outlined in the Dasarāja Dhamma, advises rulers to protect nature through ethical stewardship. Buddhist teachings on contentment, mindfulness, and frugality, as seen in the Raṭṭhapāla Sutta and Mettā Sutta, promote sustainable living practices. This research explores how Buddhist ethical principles can be applied to contemporary environmental challenges. Industrialization and unchecked consumption have resulted in environmental degradation, but Buddhist teachings offer a framework for sustainability based on mindfulness and ethical responsibility. By analyzing key texts such as the Aggañña Sutta

and Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta, this study aims to highlight the link between moral values and ecological well-being. Additionally, it will examine the role of the Five Precepts, Karaniyamettā Sutta, and monastic regulations in promoting conservation. Integrating Buddhist ethical principles into modern environmental efforts can lead to a more sustainable and compassionate approach to nature. The research seeks to demonstrate how Buddhist teachings can inspire environmentally responsible lifestyles, policy-making, and governance. With its emphasis on interconnectedness, moderation, and respect for life, Buddhism provides a profound ethical foundation for addressing today's ecological crises.

**Keywords :** Buddhism, environmental ethics, Pāli Tipiṭaka, interconnectedness, aniccā

## Introduction

For survival, humanity must rely on nature for essential needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and other necessities. To maximize the benefits from nature, humans must understand its workings and utilize natural resources in harmony with the environment. By comprehending the natural processes, such as seasonal rainfall patterns, irrigation methods, soil types, and the physical conditions necessary for growing various crops, people can achieve better outcomes in agriculture. However, this knowledge must be accompanied by moral restraint to ensure the sustainable enjoyment of these resources. Humans should focus on fulfilling their needs, not feeding their insatiable greed. While the resources of the world are finite, human greed often knows no bounds. Modern society, driven by unchecked desires for pleasure and wealth, has exploited nature to the brink of depletion. Today, consumerism is widely accepted, and within just forty years, Americans alone have consumed more natural resources than humanity as a whole has over the last 4,000 years (Packard 195). Non-renewable resources, such as fossil fuels, which took millions of years to form, have been nearly exhausted in just a couple of centuries. This reckless consumption has led to an energy crisis and increased pollution. Humanity's insatiable greed for more, similar to the fable of the goose that laid the golden eggs (J.I.475f), reminds us of the consequences of overexploitation.

In their quest for pleasure and wealth, modern humans have exploited nature without moral constraints, pushing the environment to the brink where it can no longer support healthy life. Essential elements like air and water have been polluted, leading to disastrous consequences. As human health faces alarming threats, efforts to combat pollution have intensified. People now recognize that it is both irresponsible and morally wrong to leave a polluted planet for future generations. To act responsibly toward the natural world, fellow humans, and future generations, humans must establish an environmental ethic to prevent further damage. This has led to a renewed search for wisdom, particularly in areas previously overlooked, such as religion. Buddhism with focuses on the path to end human suffering, does not directly address environmental pollution, as this issue did not exist during the Buddha's time. The Buddha avoided discussing topics unrelated to human suffering and its cessation.

However, Buddhism, as a comprehensive philosophy, provides insights into the human relationship with nature. The term "nature" refers to everything in the world not shaped by human hands, and the Pāli terms most closely related to it are "loka" (world) and "yathabhūta" (things as they truly are). The Pāli words "dhammatā" and "niyama" signify "natural law or way". A key principle in Buddhism is that change is inherent in nature. Nothing in nature remains static, a concept encapsulated by the Pāli term 'aniccā' i.e. impermanence means everything in the world is in a constant state of change (sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā) (A.IV.100). The world is defined by disintegration (lujjati ti loko); it is dynamic and always undergoing transformation (S.IV.52). In nature, there are no fixed "things" but only ever-changing processes. For example, "rain" is not a static object but the process of water droplets falling from the sky. The fundamental elements of nature, solidity (pathavi), liquidity (apo), heat (tejo), and mobility (vāyo), are all in constant flux. Even the most solid objects, like mountains and the earth

itself, are subject to change. "Pabbata Sutta" of Anguttara Nikāya illustrates this with the example of Mount Sumeru, a symbol of stability, which is ultimately destroyed by heat, showing that even the most enduring structures are not immune to the laws of impermanence (A.IV.100). Thus, change is a fundamental aspect of the nature.

### **Buddhism and Nature**

The saṃsāra goes through cycles of evolution and dissolution, each lasting for an extended period. Although, change is a constant state in nature, Buddhism teaches that human morals directly impact natural processes. In the Aggañña Sutta (D.III.80), a Buddhist legend about the world's evolution, it is explained that the manifestation of greed in the ancient beings, who were self-illuminated, lived on joy, and moved freely in the sky, led to a loss of their radiance and ability to subsist on joy. This moral decline not only affected them but also the environment. Originally, the earth was covered by a butter-like substance, which the beings greedily consumed, leading to the coarsening of their bodies. As a result, differences in physical appearance emerged, triggering pride and causing the beautiful beings to look down on others. This moral degradation led to the disappearance of the delicious earth-substance, replaced by mushrooms and creepers, and the introduction of sexual reproduction instead of spontaneous birth. Self-growing rice emerged, and human laziness in gathering food led to hoarding. This habit resulted in food production failing to keep up with demand, and land had to be divided among families. As private ownership of land became established, greed led to theft, and lying emerged to cover up the wrongdoings. To address these issues, a king was elected, transforming the simple society into a more complex one. This moral decline also harmed nature, diminishing the richness of the earth and making rice cultivation more laborious, requiring land to be worked and rice to be cleaned before consumption. This legend illustrates Buddhism's belief that while change is intrinsic to nature, human moral degradation accelerates negative changes that harm human well-being and happiness. In the Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta, the future consequences of further moral decline are predicted. As human health deteriorates, life expectancy will shrink, and the average human lifespan will be reduced to just ten years, with the marriageable age dropping to five (D.III.71). Delicacies like ghee and honey will vanish, and what is now considered coarse food will become a luxury.

The Anguttara Nikāya (A.I.160) highlights that when immorality, such as excessive lust, greed, and wrong values, grips humanity, timely rain does not fall. This causes crop failures, pest infestations, and plant diseases, resulting in a higher human mortality rate due to lack of food. Various suttas in the Pāli canon illustrate that early Buddhism acknowledges a profound relationship between human ethics and the natural world. This concept is further developed in the later commentaries through the theory of the five natural laws (pañca niyāmadhammā), that encompass (Aṭṭhasālini 85): utuniyāma (seasonal law), bījanīyāma (seed law), cittanīyāma (psychological law), kamma-niyāma (moral law), and dhammanīyāma (causal law). These laws operate in their respective spheres, but the law of causality influences all of them, demonstrating that the physical environment conditions the growth of biological life, which in turn influences human thoughts and morals. The reverse is also true, human morality can affect the biological and physical environment. These five laws illustrate the reciprocal relationship between humanity and nature, where changes in one invariably lead to changes in the other.

The commentary on the Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta (DhA.III.854) further explains that when human greed dominates, famine results; when ignorance leads to moral decline, epidemics occur; and when hatred prevails, violence spreads. However, when a change of heart occurs and moral regeneration begins, conditions improve over time, leading to greater prosperity and longer life. Thus, both nature and humanity thrive or decline depending on the prevailing moral force. If immorality takes over, both man and nature deteriorate; if morality is upheld, human life and the environment improve. Greed, hatred, and ignorance create contamination both internally and externally, whereas generosity, compassion,

and wisdom foster clarity and purity. This is why the Buddha taught that the mind is the ultimate force shaping the world i.e. *cittena nīyati loko* (S.I.39). According to early Buddhist thought, humanity and nature are interdependent.

Buddhism consistently underscores the importance of cultivating non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion in all human actions. Greed leads to suffering and negative outcomes. In contrast, contentment (*santutthi*) is highly valued (Dh.V.204), with the simple life of someone whose desire is modest and easily fulfilled being celebrated as an ideal (A.V.2, 220, 229). Both miserliness (DhA.I.20ff) and wastefulness (DhA.III.129ff) are condemned in Buddhism as harmful extremes. Wealth is regarded as having only practical value, meant to serve needs rather than accumulate unnecessarily. Hoarding is seen as a selfish, anti-social behaviour, akin to a dog guarding a manger. The vast accumulation of wealth in certain regions, along with the deliberate destruction of agricultural goods to keep prices high, while millions face hunger, highlights a paradox of our time of plenty.

Buddhism also praises frugality as a virtue. For example, Ānanda once explained to King Udena the monks' thrifty use of robes. New robes were first worn, and old robes were repurposed as coverlets, mattress covers, rugs, and even dusters. The worn-out dusters were then mixed with clay to mend the floors and walls (Vin.II.291), ensuring no wastage. Those who waste are disparaged as "wood-apple eaters (A.IV.283)," referring to a man who shakes a tree, causing ripe and unripe fruits to fall, and only takes what he needs while leaving the rest to rot. This wasteful attitude is strongly condemned in Buddhism as both anti-social and immoral. The excessive exploitation of nature today would undoubtedly be condemned by Buddhism. Buddhism also promotes a gentle, non-aggressive approach to nature. The *Singālovāda Sutta* suggests that a householder should accumulate wealth as a bee collects pollen from a flower (D.II.188): without harming the beauty or fragrance of the flower, the bee gathers pollen to create honey. In the same way, humans are encouraged to use nature responsibly to fulfil their needs, so that they can rise above it and realize their inherent spiritual potential.

### **Flora and Fauna as Depicted in Buddhism**

The Five Precepts (*pañca sila*) are the fundamental ethical guidelines that every lay Buddhist is expected to follow. The first precept calls for abstention from harming living beings, emphasizing the importance of refraining from violence. It is explained as avoiding the use of weapons and being mindful of not taking the life of any creature. Positively, this precept encourages the cultivation of compassion and empathy for all forms of life (D.I.4). Additionally, lay Buddhists are expected to refrain from engaging in the meat trade (A.III.208). Buddhist monks are required to observe an even stricter ethical code. They must avoid actions that could unintentionally cause harm to living creatures. For example, the Buddha forbade travelling during the rainy season, as it could lead to the injury of worms and insects that surface during wet weather (Vin.I.137). This respect for life also prohibits monks from digging the ground (Vin.IV.125), as it could harm living organisms below the surface. In one instance, a monk who had been a potter before ordination, constructed a clay hut and set it on fire to give it a finishing touch to it. The Buddha objected strongly, as the fire would likely to harm many small creatures, and instructed the hut to be dismantled to prevent setting a bad example for future generations (Vin.III.42). Similarly, monks avoid drinking unstrained water (Vin.IV.125), not just for hygienic reasons, but out of sympathy for the tiny creatures that might be harmed by drinking water that is not properly filtered.

Buddhism also promotes *mettā*, or loving-kindness, toward all living beings without discrimination. In the *Karaniyamettā Sutta*, the Buddha instructs that one should cultivate loving-kindness towards all creatures, whether they are timid or bold, large or small, visible or invisible, near or far, born or yet to be born (Sn.vv.143-152). Just as one's own life is precious to oneself, so too is the life of others precious to them, and therefore all forms of life should be treated with equal reverence. The

Nandivīsāla Jātaka (J.I.191) mentions how kindness should be extended towards animals domesticated for human beings. Even wild animals, such as Parileyya, a wild elephant who served the Buddha, can be tamed with kindness (DhA.I.58ff). In a similar story, the Buddha tamed the enraged elephant Nālagiri simply through the power of loving-kindness (Vin.II.194f). The Buddha's example shows that humans and animals can live in harmony, free from fear, if humanity practices compassion and kindness toward all living beings.

The Buddhist understanding of kamma and rebirth further reinforces a compassionate attitude toward animals. It is believed that humans can be reborn as animals, as supported by the Kukkuravatika Sutta (M.I.387f). The Jātakas also mention that humans may have once been animals, suggesting that we should treat animals with the same kindness we would wish for ourselves. Furthermore, acts of kindness toward animals can accumulate merit, which aids in improving one's standing in the cycle of rebirth and progressing toward the ultimate goal of Nibbāna (A.I.161). For instance, the Macchuddāna Jātaka describes how the Bodhisattva threw leftover food into a river to feed the fish, and the merit earned due to this act, he was saved from a potential disaster (J.II.423).

Buddhism also advocates a non-violent attitude toward plant life. It is said that one should never break a branch of a tree that has provided shelter (Petavatthu.II.9 & 3). Plants are essential to human life, providing sustenance and other necessities, and we are encouraged not to harm them thoughtlessly. In the monastic code, monks are strictly prohibited from injuring plant life, reflecting the deep respect for all living things (Vin.IV.34). Before Buddhism emerged, people viewed natural phenomena like mountains, forests, groves, and trees with deep awe and respect (Dh.v.188). These places were seen as dwelling places for powerful non-human entities capable of offering help in times of need. While Buddhism introduced a higher refuge for humans in the three jewels of Buddhism that is known as Triple Gem (Tiratna or Tisaraṇa) that are Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṃgha, these natural sites remained widely supported by the public. This was because the belief in non-human beings, such as devatās (S.I.1-45) and yakkhas (S.I.206-215), did not conflict with the core teachings of Buddhism.

In Buddhist culture, there is a deep reverence, particularly for ancient and massive trees. These trees are referred to as vanaspati in Pāli, meaning "lords of the forests" (S.IV.302; Dh.A.I.3). The veneration of trees is further reinforced by the recognition of large trees like the ironwood, Sāla, and fig as the Bodhi Vṛkṣa of former Buddhas (D.II.4). The ficus religiosa is especially revered, as it is believed to be the tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment (D.II.4). The creation of parks and pleasure groves for public enjoyment is seen as a highly meritorious act (S.I.33). It is said that Sakka, the lord of the gods, achieved his divine status through acts of social service, including the construction of parks, pleasure groves, ponds, wells, and roads (M.I.118; S.IV.373). Thus, building such spaces for the public is regarded as a noble and virtuous deed in Buddhism.

In Buddhist thought, natural habitats such as forests symbolize spiritual freedom. Home life, in contrast, is often seen as a form of bondage that ties individuals to worldly suffering. Renunciation is likened to the freedom of the open air (abbhokāsa), unburdened by human activity (D.I.63). The Buddha's key life events took place in natural settings; he was born in a park under a Sāla tree at Kapilavatthu, attained enlightenment in the open air under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, and began his missionary work in the open air at the Sāla Grove of the Mallās in Pāva. The Buddha regularly advised his disciples to retreat to natural environments, such as forest groves, where they could meditate without distractions, in order to deepen their practice and move closer to enlightenment (M.I.118; S.IV.373).

### **Similes on Environment in Buddhism**

The Buddha spent forty-five years of his life immersed in the tranquillity of natural surroundings, forests, riverbanks, mountains, valleys, and fields. These serene environments were where he spent



most of his time, preaching both day and night. Numerous occasions of his teachings are recorded in such settings. For instance, while residing in a peaceful grove near the village of Icchānaṅgala, the Buddha delivered the Ambaṭṭha Sutta (D.I.150) to the young Ambaṭṭha. He preached the Tevijja Sutta in a mango grove by the Aciravati River, north of Mānasātaka in the kingdom of Kosala (D.I.594). The Mahāsihanāda Sutta was taught to Sāriputta Thera in the forest near Vesālī (M.I.164). The famous Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, which marks the turning of the wheel of righteousness, was preached at the Deer Park near Varanasi (S.V.270). In the Kalandakanivāpa woodland, where squirrels were protected (S.IV.126), the Buddha delivered the Mahā Moggallāna Sutta. He also travelled to the forest of Ghosīṅga to teach the Cūlaghosīṅga Sutta (M.I.484) to his disciples Anuruddha, Kambila, and Nandiya. The Simsapā Sutta was delivered at the Simsapā Grove (S.V.294).

Similarly, the Buddha often preached along the banks of rivers and ponds. The Soṇadanda Sutta was delivered near the Gaggarā pond close to the city of Campā (D.I.222). He preached the Dhaniya Sutta to Dhaniya Gopāla on the banks of the Mahī River (Sn.12). The Kāśibhāradvāja Sutta was delivered to the Brahmana Kāśibhāradvāja in a field Sn.110. The events of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta begin at Gijjhakūṭa Mountain near Rājagaha (D.I.110). On one occasion, while the Buddha was meditating alone in a forest, a goddess appeared and expressed her fear at the loud sounds made by birds during the mid-day. The Buddha replied, “When the birds sing sweetly in the forest, my heart is filled with delight” (S.I.140).

The Buddha frequently used the natural world as a source of similes. The Pāli Suttas reveal that he often drew comparisons with trees, saying, “Monks, there are four types of trees: (i) barren trees surrounded by barren trees, (ii) fruitful trees surrounded by barren trees, (iii) barren trees surrounded by fruitful trees, and (iv) fruitful trees surrounded by fruitful trees. In the same way, there are four kinds of people: some are evil and surrounded by evil company, some are good but surrounded by evil company, some are evil but surrounded by good company, and some are good and surrounded by good company (A.I.109).

On another occasion, the Buddha used the simile of rain, saying, “Monks, when heavy rain falls on the mountain summit, it fills small pits, ravines, and eventually great rivers, and then the ocean. Similarly, mental formations are conditioned by ignorance” (S.II.50). The Yamakavagga of the Dhammapada which is rich in similes, offers another example: “Just as rain breaks through a poorly thatched house, so passion breaks through an unreflecting mind” (Dh.v.62). The Alagaddupama Sutta mentions Rivers, which symbolize beauty in nature, are frequently used in similes (M.I.324). The Buddha said, “Just as the river finds rest only in the ocean, so too do the followers of the Buddha find rest only in Nibbāna” (M.I.493). The confluence of the Gangā and Yamunā rivers is often used as a simile for perfect union (J.IV.412, 415).

The Buddha also used flowers (Pupphavagga: Dh.74ff), wild animals (the Khaggavisāna Sutta: Sn.22), and mountains (The Paṇḍitavagga: Dh.V.77.84) in his similes. Flowers represent the fruit of the natural world, wild beasts embody certain human traits, and mountains symbolize challenges or spiritual heights. Through these similes, the Buddha utilized the entire natural environment to illustrate his teachings. Having been born in a beautiful natural environment, the Buddha lived in harmony with it, attained enlightenment, preached his doctrine, and ultimately passed away in its embrace. His life offers a powerful example of how one can live harmoniously with nature, learning from its profound lessons and using it as a source of spiritual inspiration.

### **Environmental Conservation as Depicted in Buddhism**

Buddhism recognizes that humans are nurtured and protected by the environment. The physical environment, when pure and unspoiled by pollution, whether air, water, sound, or soil, reflects the highest legacy of humanity. There is no doubt about Buddhism’s stance on conservation, which is

evident in many teachings and discourses of the Buddha. Buddhism emphasizes that it is virtuous to cultivate flora that maintains the balance of the physical environment, enhances beauty, and provides various benefits to humankind. One day, a deity asked the Buddha, “Whose merit grows by day and night, and who is the righteous, virtuous person that ascends to the realm of bliss?” In the Vanaropa Sutta, the Buddha responded by explaining that those who plant groves, parks, build bridges, dig ponds, and create dwelling places accumulate merit, growing spiritually both day and night. Such individuals, through their virtuous deeds, ascend to heavenly realms (S.I.60).

Buddhist monks, especially those who are fully ordained (*upasampadā*), are strictly prohibited from destroying trees and plants. This reflects the Buddha's deep reverence for the environment. According to the *Sāmaññaphala* sutta of the Sutta Pitaka (D.I.112), the destruction of organic life is not permissible. Monks are expected to lead exemplary lives, living in harmony with the environment. During the rains retreat, monks are instructed to stay in specific locations to ensure even the smallest creatures, including plants, are protected. Their dwellings are often situated at the foot of trees or *rukkhamūla* (M.I.238), which serve as a reminder of the interconnection between humans and nature. Trees, in particular, offer numerous benefits, providing fruit and shelter for others (*Paropakārāya phalanti vṛkṣa*).

The Buddha's teachings emphasize the interconnectedness of all environmental factors, rain, plants, soil, wind, and more, similar to a web where each element depends on the others. Like trees and plants, these environmental elements are meant to serve the needs of all beings. The *Milinda Pañhā*, a text from post-canonical Buddhist literature, describes how trees and plants support human life (*Milinda Pañhā*: 354). According to the *Rukkhaṭṭhapañhā* of the *Milinda Pañhā*,

1. It is called a tree because it bears flowers and fruits (*Rukkho nāma puppha phala dharo*). Flowers generate beauty, and show the reality and transitoriness of life. (*Pupphaṃ milāyati yatthā idam me kāyo tathā yāti vināśabhāvam*). Fruits supply savour and energy, similarly they carry on the continuity of trees.
2. Trees provide shade to those who approach them. (*Rukkho-upagatamanu pavitthanam jananaṃ chāyā deti*). The shade of a tree is a natural comfort.
3. The tree provides its shadow equally to everybody. (*Rukkho chāya vemattaṃ na karoti*). The tree that gives its shadow to both friend and foe, teaches a lesson of true loving-kindness.

Trees are considered beneficial because they bear flowers and fruits, which provide both beauty and sustenance. Flowers symbolize the fleeting nature of life, while fruits offer nourishment, helping the continuity of life.

Additionally, trees offer shade to all who approach them, irrespective of their status, symbolizing the Buddha's teachings on universal loving-kindness. Buddhism advocates for the protection and care of trees, highlighting their importance to both the environment and humankind. Just as a mother carefully nurtures her child, rain nourishes both the industrious and the lazy. The *Pajjota Sutta* teaches that all living things depend on rain for survival (S.I.28). Consequently, the Buddha, who cherished water and rain, taught that their purity must be preserved and that pollution is to be avoided. The Vinaya rules state that water should be kept pure, recognizing its essential role in the ecosystem. Trees, along with all other creatures in the environment, are interconnected. Buddhism promotes compassion and non-violence toward all living beings, as emphasized in the first precept of Buddhist morality, which prohibits killing (*Pānātipātā veramani sikkhā padaṃ samādiyāni*). This precept encourages individuals to cultivate compassion, not only toward humans but all creatures, emphasizing that killing, as one of the ten unwholesome deeds, leads to worldly suffering. According to the *Dandavagga* (Dh.v.14), those who avoid harm to others, whether human or animal, are true ascetics, monks, or Brahmins (*Sabbesu*

bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍaṃ).

The Kūṭadanta Sutta advocates for a non-violent approach to life, which includes the preservation of the environment (D.I.264). It is also the responsibility of rulers to protect trees and other forms of life, as outlined in the Dasarāja Dhamma (The Ten Duties of the King). The second duty focuses on morality (sīla), while the eighth emphasizes non-violence (avihiṃsā) (J.I.260, 399; J.II.400; J.III.274, 320; J.V.119, 378). The Kūṭadanta Sutta reinforces the idea that governments should protect both flora and fauna (D.I.264). The Buddha often praised environmental purity, beauty, and hygiene, all of which are elaborated in the Vattakkhandha of the Cullavagga Pāli. A true understanding of the significance of the environment encourages society to actively conserve it. Just as humans should revere and protect nature, the Buddha also emphasized the loss caused by environmental mismanagement, such as water pollution, sound pollution, air pollution, and soil degradation. Clean water, essential for both plants and animals, must be preserved. Buddhism guides individuals to avoid water pollution and to protect natural water resources, underscoring the interconnectedness of all life.

Buddhism teaches that moral conduct is essential for fostering a harmonious, empathetic relationship with the environment. Without such an attitude, humans can inadvertently harm the natural world. Contentment and simplicity are key Buddhist principles that support environmental protection. Buddhism advocates for people to be frugal, self-sufficient, composed, and intelligent in their use of resources. This mindset helps ensure the sustainable use and preservation of the environment which is clearly mentioned in the Mettā Sutta (Santussako ca subhāro ca appakicco ca sallahukāvutti-santīndriyo ca nipāko ca) (Sn.44). As the Pupphavagga of the Dhammapada advises, one should live in the environment without causing harm to it (Dh.v.6): “Just as a bee gathers honey from a flower and departs without injuring the flower, or its color, or its fragrance, so let a sage dwell in his village.” According to the Raṭṭhapāla Sutta (M.II.420), those who are freed from craving see life as impermanent, which leads them to live with little desire and a sense of contentment. Such individuals use resources moderately, eat modestly, and wear only what is necessary. In such a society, environmental resources are well-protected and preserved for future generations. Through these teachings, Buddhism encourages individuals to cultivate a mindful, responsible, and compassionate relationship with the environment, recognizing its vital role in sustaining life and promoting the well-being of all beings.

## Conclusion

This article aims to explore how devotion to the environment can contribute to its conservation. Both humans and the environment are intrinsically linked, and ancient people appeared to possess a natural awareness of this interconnectedness. This awareness was not a constructed concept but an inherent understanding. Evidence abounds to show that early civilizations had a deep, empathetic devotion toward their environment. Ascetics, particularly those in search of spiritual truth, rejected environments that were disturbed, polluted, or chaotic due to human settlements. These seekers favoured secluded, untouched surroundings, free from air and noise pollution. They chose forests and natural landscapes that remained pure and undisturbed.

Ancient Aryan Indian civilization, too, reveals how these truth-seeking ascetics recognized the blessings of a pristine environment, living in harmony with nature's tranquillity. Eastern poets, throughout history, have celebrated the aesthetic beauty of the natural world. Works like the Meghadūta by Kālidāsa are prime examples of this literary tradition, where nature, rivers, streams, trees, and flowers, were lauded for its inherent beauty. For these poets, describing nature was not merely an artistic endeavour but an essential duty, reflecting their deep reverence for the natural environment. Farmers, too, have long drawn sustenance from the environment. They relied on the flourishing of plants, the fertility of the soil, and the presence of rivers and streams to support their livelihoods. Cows, considered the greatest



wealth, depended on the vitality of the land, rain, and grass. This deep interdependence between humans and the environment has enriched Eastern cultures for millennia. Even powerful Eastern kings, who enjoyed material wealth, acknowledged the beauty of nature. The Pāli Canonical texts suggest that rulers were inspired by the natural world, with their hearts stirred by the serenity of the environment (D.I.88). A clear example of this is found in the Dhammacetiya Sutta, where the King Pasenadi Kosala, walking through a secluded and beautiful park, paused at the foot of a solitary tree and was reminded of the Buddha (M.I.550). Such moments illustrate how kings found spiritual inspiration and solace in the quiet, unspoiled environment.

Religious traditions like Buddhism and Jainism have long upheld respect for all living beings, with a focus on compassion for all forms of life. These traditions did not sharply differentiate between humans and animals, as evidenced by the Mettā Sutta, which calls for love and compassion for all creatures: *Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā* (May all beings be happy) (Sn.44). This compassionate view extended to flora and fauna, with Jainism's principle of nonviolence applying not only to animals but also to plants. Buddhist monks, living celibate lives, resided in close proximity to nature, often choosing to live in forests, at the foot of trees, or in remote, peaceful locations. The Pāli Canon describes how these monks attained purity in sacred and beautiful places, mountains, caves, and riverbanks, free from pollution and disturbance. A monk's ordination was preceded by dwelling at the foot of a tree (*rukkhamūla senāsānan nissāya pabbajjā*) (Mu.347), symbolizing the importance of the natural environment in spiritual life. The Buddha himself, who cherished the unspoiled beauty of the natural world, set an example of environmental devotion. His teachings and discipline emphasized the importance of maintaining the environment without polluting it, using its resources responsibly, and working with it in harmony. His followers, inspired by this devotion, lived lives that avoided pollution, preserved the purity of water and air, and valued silence and tranquillity. This environmental devotion was not merely a spiritual ideal but a practical guide for daily living. The Buddha's biography, teachings, and the community of his disciples reflect a deep, pragmatic connection to the environment. This leads to care and respect for the natural world, serves as a powerful model for the modern world (Thag.A.132). It offers guidance for how we can approach environmental conservation, encouraging us to live in harmony with the Earth, protect its beauty, and ensure its preservation for future generations.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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