

# Ecology and Buddhism

## Ökologie und Buddhismus

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Eine Handlung, die auf dem Planeten Erde vor sich geht, ist nicht vom Universum, das aus der kosmischen oder himmlischen Sphäre, dem Erdglobus und der Menschenwelt besteht, getrennt. Jede Gegebenheit ist mit jeder anderen Gegebenheit verbunden und wirkt auf die vielen starken und schwachen Kräfte des Universums. Um die harmonische Ökologie unserer Erde zu verstehen, müssen verschiedene Kraft- und Energiequellen der natürlichen Welt in Betracht gezogen werden. Deshalb bezieht sich das Öko-Gleichgewicht der verschiedenen Weltsphären unter Einbezug der psychischen Sphäre der Lebewesen auf geordnete Interaktionen der materiellen Partikeln und Antipartikeln, sowie auf konstruktive und destruktive psychische Funktionen der Lebewesen auf dieser Erde. Der Buddhismus, der im ersten Jahrtausend vor Christus im alten Indien entstand, hat eine indigene Annäherung zur Welt und seiner Funktionen geerbt. Buddha Gautama betonte die Momenthaftigkeit, den Fluss, die Vergänglichkeit aller Gegebenheiten, sowohl physisch als auch psychisch. Das gegebene Öko-Gleichgewicht wird über die „Kette des abhängigen Entstehens“ sichtbar, das entsprechend der Taten (*karma*) der Lebewesen stimmig oder unstimmig ist. Die menschliche Welt kann deshalb unharmonisch gestört oder friedlich harmonisch sein. Ohne angemessene Sicht der Wirklichkeit wird das Öko-Gleichgewicht gestört und leidhaft, wie der Buddha festgestellt hat.

### I

Ecology deals with the conservation of life and the intrigues of their interrelations in environs congenial to live.<sup>1</sup> Any set of living creatures uses natural resources available in the course of vital activity and adopt itself to the conditions of the environment. Also they tend to transform the environs in the course of time, led by the eco-system.<sup>2</sup>

Etymologically, ecology is constituted of Greek *oikos* meaning ‘house’. *Logia* is indicating the character, action or a branch of knowledge. Here, ecology refers to ‘house’ or ‘habitat’ or living beings in the plant kingdom and the animal kingdom. The Humans belong to the latter with high rational power and efficiency.

About the origin of life in bio-sphere, scientists are diverse in opinions. The geological time-table of this solar earth speculates some date through which life is evolved.<sup>3</sup> Several steps of chemical factors and bio-processes tend to presume the

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<sup>1</sup> Concise Oxford English dictionary (1963 edition): David Jary and Julia Jary. Collin's Dictionary of Sociology. Harper Collins. London 1991.

<sup>2</sup> G. Tansely used eco-system (1935): Clark Woodhouse and Odum further developed it.

<sup>3</sup> Existence of the earth: 460-500 crores years; evidential dates: stone pieces dating 400 crores years and more traces of plant life: 260 crores years under the great oceans, evidential dates: 50 crores years; fish: 40 crores years; toads amphibious: 30 crores years; serpents: 18 crores years; birds: 14

origination of life on the earth.<sup>4</sup> Myths, legends and mystic tales in this regard are hypothesized against lab-oriented theories.

Prior to examine the Buddhist view regarding ecology of the living beings a few words about congeniality of 'eco' may be relevant. Our earth is not isolated from the other cosmic items of the universe like planets galaxies of stars, constellations and milky-way which are partly visible to us. Despite that, each phenomenon of this visible solar world is interrelated to by interactions with the other phenomena belonging to the Universe. Two vital forces of interactions are the electro-magnetic force and the force of gravitation. The former is proved to be the Strong force of Interaction (SI), the latter is the Weak force of Interaction (WI). Owing to radioactive collapse to transform the gravitation force weakens.

According to the modern scientists the cosmic worlds consist of uncountable stars in the open space or firmament which is boundless, infinite. The blue azure sky which appears before us is an empty space, densely dark and freezing cold in temperature (-273° Celsius as interferometer records). Since our solar planet, the earth, is a minute part of the universe, this global earth and the phenomena belonging to it interact with the above forces. The cosmic worlds are visible in the milky-way which is one of the galaxies conducting macro-waves in the universe, in spite of the latter's homogenous and isotropic nature.<sup>5</sup>

The eco (*oikos*) of living beings is interrelated to three spheres mentioned in ancient Indian literatures: the earth (*bhuh*<sup>6</sup>), the ether (*bhuvah*) and the cosmic illuminated-sphere (*svah*).

While the Indian spherical concepts extend up to the macro-cosmic sphere, the scope of 'ecology' according to the bio-scientists is limited within atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere and biosphere. The Indian spherical concepts are narrated in the eleventh chapter of the Shrimad-Bagavadgita where it is said that vision is said to be achieved by the esoteric efficiency.<sup>7</sup> Regarding the origin of life, and the

crores years; mammals: 6 crores years; primitive sapiens species homo: 1 crores years; ancestors of humans of our days: 10 mill. years.

<sup>4</sup> Prevailing theories on the origin of life: 1. Pre-Aristotolin spherical concepts of life out of undereterminate origin in Greece; 2. Aristotle (384-323 B.C.) and Democritus: Search for rational understanding regarding the origin of life. 3. Francesco Redi of Italy (1680 A.D.): Theory of the spontaneous origin by Louis Pasteur (1822-1895). 4. Freid Hoyal Erif for Daniken: Theory of cosmic origin. 5. Father Suarez of Spain: Theory of special creation (by God). 6. Cuvier (1862-1932): Theroy of catastrophism. 7. Fluesor (1829-1910), Germany: Cyanogen Theory (chemical process of carbon and nitrogen to transform protoplasm); 8. Osborn (1836-1936): Bacterial theory; 9. Fred Hayle and Chandrea Wikramsege claim that our earth has been intelligent because of an assembly of station to life. Amino acid is available on earth and aids formation of an organic cell and molecules as a chemical process. That is regarded as the virus theory. 10. Jean (Baptiste Antonio de Monet) Lamarck (1744-1829) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882): Doctrine of descent (organic evolutionary theory through the process of natural selection).

<sup>5</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica: (Macropadic) terms on the universe, gravitation and electro-magnetism. Among the leading scientists George Hale, Mount Wilson, Harlow Shapely, Edwin Hubble, Milton Humason deserve mention. General or extended theory of relativity with four-dimensional space time continuum discovered by Albert Einstein opened a new dimension to search for anthropic principle. See also James Jeans: The universe around us: 1929. Two divergent views on the question, wether the universe is a product of blind chance or a conscious design, are yet debatable.

<sup>6</sup> Diacritic signs had to be omitted, editors.

<sup>7</sup> *Anadi-madhyantam-anantavirya anantavabum shashi-surya-netram*

bio-somatic structural modus operandi, the sun is the ‘source of energy’ which contacts the ecological niche. The energy flows down in diverse processes to constitute biotic factors of the ecosystem. The solar energy in respect to all biotic and a-biotic components has direct or indirect interactive relations. The controversy regarding environmental sciences and the living environment open a room for debating, whether the universe is a product of blind chance or a conscious design — the big quest that mankind searches.

As early as by the second millennium B.C. an unknown seer (*rshi*) raised in the Kenopanisad the point: *How does life function? Is there an agent? If so, who is?*<sup>8</sup>

For understanding the ecology of living beings on our earth, a general knowledge regarding the principles of the forces in action, reactions, counter-actions and re-counter-actions at the macro-cosmic level is necessary.

## II

In the east Lao-tse in China focused in his Tao-te-ching on the problem of the universe and the animated beings. The Vedic seers explored the sun as the ‘source of energy’ of all beings in this world. The Savitri hymn, therefore prays to be enkindled by the rays of the sun:

*OM<sup>9</sup> Let the cosmic rays of savita the producer enkindle our intellect by radiance.*<sup>10</sup>

Gautama, the Buddha, also repeatedly referred to the ‘solar energy’ and praised:

*Sacrifices are led by the fire (lit. fire-mouth), Savitri (-mantra) is the face of the Vedas, a king is the leader of the humans, an ocean is the mouth of the rivers, the moon is the chief of the constellations, the sun is the source of energy, meritorious deeds escalate the seekers of the Bliss, to Nirvana, and the sangha conducts them.* In response to the Vedic seer Keniya *Jatila*, the above *gatha* was an outburst.<sup>11</sup>

Many sayings of the Buddha in the Buddhist *Tripitaka* are similar in context.

The Daghnikaya of Suttapitaka in Pali<sup>12</sup> refers to the following seven classes of sentient beings in different spherical worlds (*loka*): the human world (*manussaloka*), the animals in the same world (*tiracchanayon*), the underground world where the beings of darkness dwell for their performance of bad deeds (*nirayaloka*), the world of departed beings (*petaloka*), the world of strong beings with untamed power and efficiency, despite the performance of negative deeds (*asuraloka*), and the world of beings of elevated status by the merit of having performed positive deeds (*devaloka*). There are three classes: the beings in the desire planes (*Kamavacara*); the beings belonging to the plane of shaping in forms (*rupavacara*), and the beings having no-form but are in existence (*arupavacara*). The *Majjhima-nikaya* divides the beings into two categories: constituted (*samkhata*) and unconstituted (*asamkhata*). *Lokadhatu*, the sphere of existence according to the Buddhist cosmology, is consti-

<sup>8</sup> *dyava-prithivyo-idam-antaram hi vyaptam twayaikena dishesa sarvah*

<sup>9</sup> OM, actually AUM; A for unending, non-beginning, non-disintegrating; U from earth to the endless extend; M for great; i.e. the three spheres: earth, ether and the above.

<sup>10</sup> OM *bhu(r)-bhuvah svah* OM *tatsavitur-varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yo nah pracodayat* OM

<sup>11</sup> *udanam udaneti.* (Mahavagga, Vinaya-pitaka in Pali III, 14)

<sup>12</sup> II P.T.S. ed. P. 68-69

tuted or composed of ever-expanding millions of worlds, as those are liable to change and to transform in the course of time (*kala*).

The *Dighanikaya*<sup>13</sup> states in a dialogue with Ananda that the great earth (*mahapathavi*) rests on water, water on fire, fire on air, and air on space (*akash*) which is unconstituted. Thus the universe is constituted in the unconstituted space. The human beings along with the other sentient beings are constituted by few constituents: non-material mental constituents (*nama*) and material constituents (*rupa*). The latter is more dependent on primary matters like soil or earth, water, fire and air.<sup>14</sup>

The *Dhammapada* verses mention too to learn eco-harmony from small animate beings like bees and flowers:

As a bee, without harming the flower its colour and fragrance collects its honey, so the sage should wander in a village (without causing any harm to its members). As a flower that is lovely, beautiful and scent-laden, so fruitful is the one who speaks well spoken words.<sup>15</sup>

In the life-stories of Buddha Gautama we find many references for not harming plant life. Wild life in the forest is also mentioned by *Santideva* in the *Bodhicaryavatara* (VIII 75):

*When shall I come to dwell in forest  
Amongst the deer, birds and the trees,  
That say nothing unpleasant  
And would be delightful to accompany with.*

In India in the first millenium B.C. biological taxonomy with their identification was indigenously innovated especially by healers of diseases, ritual practitioners, land cultivators, forest dwellers and hunters. The *Nikaya* texts of *Suttapitaka* and *Vinayapitaka* occasionally refer to multiple plants and animate beings. Adequate warnings how to maintain their respective existence and coherence have also been laid down, particularly in the *Patimokkha* rules.<sup>16</sup> Moreover anatomical and physiological descriptions of the human body and their functioning are depicted in the *Abhidhammapitaka* and the *Suttapitaka* for probation in meditation and esoteric practice. Those make a candidate inquisitive of the eco-learning and to develop eco-literacy.

<sup>13</sup> II. P.T.S. ed. P. 107

<sup>14</sup> For a chemical explanation of the Vedic and the Upanisadic sources, see: Works of Pandit guru Data Vidyarthi, compiled and edited by Ram Prakash.

<sup>15</sup> *Yatha hi bhamaro puppham vanna gandham-abethyam/paleti rasamadaya evam game muni care;* Dhammapada IV.6. P.T.S. ed.

<sup>16</sup> For a recluse *pratimoksa* (Pali *patimokkha*) is an obligatory confessional function irrespective of the *nikaya* difference. Four *parajika* cardinal points are strictly disciplinary: 1. adultery or sexual offence 2. swindling or theft 3. slaughter or killing 4. performing miracles. Durga N. Bhagwat critically examines the Buddha's jurisprudence under Vinaya rules and socio-ecological prospect of Theravada Buddhist laws in: Early Buddhist Jurisprudence. Cosmo publications, Delhi 1952.

## III

Like the Theravadins, the Mahasanghikas who bifurcated after the Vaishali council (ca. 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B. C.) laid greater stress on environmental issues. The Buddha's saying *be tender to all sentient beings like a mother who fosters her only child with loving tenderness*<sup>17</sup> opened a new vista of universal compassion, when the ideal of Bodhisattva had replaced the *arhat*-hood attainable through the four paths and their corresponding four fruits.<sup>18</sup> The Bodhisattva is avowed to redress the suffering of all sentient beings. In the Mahayana Sutras four biotic worlds are mentioned:

1. born of eggs or spherodial body (*andaja*)
2. born of sweat or external secretion of fluid (*svedaja*)
3. born of ovary and uterus organs (*jarayya*)
4. plants like animate beings germinated out of seeds, stems (*upapaduka*).

These animated beings are constituted and governed by the law of dependent origination (*pratityasamutpada*).<sup>19</sup> Animals and plants are constituted phenomena and therefore interdependent. The primaries earth, water, fire and air hold the following attributes, as described in the *Arthavivishcayasutra*:

1. earth: heavy, hard but soluble
2. water: fluid, percolative but evaporable
3. fire: heat conductor, digestive but burning
4. air: light (in weight), extensive, but contractive
5. space: with no attribute of its own as it is unconstituted.

So the law of dependent origination tends to changeability of the constituted.<sup>20</sup> The phenomenal world is therefore impermanent (*anitya*) and of no essence (*anatma*).

Vasubandhu (4<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.) interprets in his *Abhidharmakosha* the biosphere with reference to the Buddhist cosmology and meditative deep-psychology in quest of ceaseless harmony. A neutral mental state like space (*khasama*) is experienced through deep meditation. It becomes separate from the 'eco' in respect of aggregated sentient by interactive relation to the great primaries and that makes the world apparently real (*samvritika satya*). An ordinary person is therefore susceptible to the relativity concerning the many psycho-somatic and bio-physical sensations (*vedana*) arising out of allurement (*raga*), malice (*avesa*) and delusion (*moha*). They usually lead to self-desire, craving pleasure by killing animals, to swallow, or doing other social crimes.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On the fourfold *brahmavihara*: amity, compassion, rejoice and indifference.

<sup>18</sup> *Marga-phala*. Buddhism like the Vedic sages holds a dynamic approach of going forward. Hence the concepts of the path (*marga*) and the attainment of result (*phala*). There are generally four steps in Theravada Buddhism and in Mahayana Buddhism (*paramita*).

<sup>19</sup> In Pali *paticcasamuppada*

<sup>20</sup> *The great Shramana (Buddha) holds thus: The phenomena which originate by causation are liable to degenerate as the Taithagata says.* (Mahavagga, Vinayapitaka in Pali). This verse is one of the integrative principles of all Buddhists throughout the world. Cf. Rajendrajit Royadarshi: Philosophical Developments of modern physics and the Buddha theory of Pratityasamutpada. Sarnath, Varanasi 1981.

<sup>21</sup> *Abhidharmakosha* I.8 of Vasubandhu

Those violent negative and destructive tendencies against the bio-physical harmony in the nature around are caused by ignorance (*avidya*), the first factor of the phenomenal law of dependent cause and effects. The Buddha therefore prescribed the measures how to resist from that downing-course of extrovertive look on the apparent real. His positive device is to move upward against the current (*pratishotra*) of a stream.

A Bodhisattva, who develops an awakening altruistic mind (*bodhicitta*) endeavours to lead a harmonious life by refraining from unnecessary killing of animals for pleasure sake and from other disintegrative acts for personal interest. The incident of prince Siddhartha saving the life of a crane, who was wounded by Devadatta's arrow, may be cited. The first five rules of the *Pratimoksa-sutra* amount to be the positive measure to make the human world habitable along with the bio-sphere, atmosphere and socio-ethical environment.

How will a human being sustain without killing or destroying? The Buddha's codified principle of proper livelihood (*samyak ajiva*) is the answer:<sup>22</sup> A renunciated recluse should maintain his livelihood by minimum requirements to live. Four cardinal principles prompt to lead an unburdened life with social security and social obligation. That is the procedure of four primary features of a recluse's life.

- 1) To live on bowls (*pindapatabbojana*)
- 2) To live under the tree shades (*vrksamula-shayanasana*)
- 3) To find clothes rejected in cremation fields (*pamsukula civara*)
- 4) To cure ailments by the patient's urine and other excretion (*putimutrabhaisajya*).

In course time, the harsh rigors liberalized; but to live on with minimum requirement prevails in spite of the spread of monastic organisations widely. To live on begging bowls has changed into doners (*dayada*) contributory practice. The bowl-practice leads a problem about the kind and quality of food from the benefactors. The *Pratimoksa*-rules control the behaviours of the beneficiary recluses. As regards the kind of food, vegetarian or non-vegetarian, a full chapter devotes in the *Lankavatara-sutra* whether meat is admissible or not, in respect to a yogin, who practices amity for all beings.<sup>23</sup>

#### IV

A Bodhisattva is an elect being in the process of 'becoming' a Buddha. In the course of time the scope of being Buddha became multiple as many as thousands, because Buddhism claims the possibility of attaining perfection by each and every individual. Two courses of practise are followed: by proper exercise continuously leading up to highest practice par excellence (*paramita*) on various socio-ethical features like tolerance, moral conduct etc; and by elegant endeavour (*virya*) of esoteric

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<sup>22</sup> *samyak-ajiva* means 'proper livelihood', which refers to the appropriate values in life by one's professions as required for being alive. It is not always ethical or social, but also environmental to adjudicate which is proper or improper. F. ex. violence, adultery etc. are caused by three malignancy of the mind; that is, symbolically, to be in the grip of *Mara*, who holds allurement (*raga*) for possessing more malice (*dresa*) for belittling others and delusion (*moha*) for encroaching the jurisdiction of others for voluptuous desire or thirst (*trsna*).

<sup>23</sup> *Lankavatara-sutra* chapt. VIII *Mamsabbaksana-parivarta*, Nanjo ed. 1923, p. 256

practices (*sadhana*) for mental upliftment up to the accomplishment (*siddhi*) of becoming a Buddha. By the adamantine-like *vajra* vow (*samaya*) a Vajradhara-Bodhisattva may achieve Buddhahood in this life by the observance of mental determination (*mantra*) and esoteric continuum (*tantra*).<sup>24</sup> Endeavours for total unification with the nature around prompt a practitioner to have a habitat or eco for observance:

- a) observance of rituals akin to the nature and the phenomena around (*kriyatantra*),
- b) tendency of growing allied habits with nature (*caryatantra*)
- c) continuous engaging in esoteric practices with adequate momentary mental awareness for being unified with the universe and its parts (*yogatantra*)
- d) experience of introversion through thorough unification of wisdom (*prajna*) with means (*upaya*), as the two principles become unseparable in order to be equated with the innate self-nature of the universe (*anuttarayoga* or *adavayayoga*) by retroversion of relativity, as a whole.

A new vista of Buddhism emerged to integrate the peoples of Asia with a tendency of adaptation by accepting flexibility. The *Manjushrimulatantra* which is regarded as a *vaipulya-sutra* as well leads emphasis on adherence to multiple aspects of the terrestrial sphere as congenial to introspection by an avowed practitioner. The text mentions the procedure of painting the images of worshipped deities (*patavidhana*) and their placement before the *Tantra*-rituals under the open sky on the hill top at midnight of the full moon day. A practitioner utilizes the best occasion to experience the association of *oikos* or real habitat. The text further refers to the movement of stars, planets, the moon, the sun and other constellations which throw light on the cosmic sphere interacting with the sentient beings on earth, inclusive of the mind and body of humans.<sup>25</sup>

Thus astronomy and astrology become relevant to the Tantric esoteric adamantine-vow (*Vajrayana*). The Wheel of Time (*Kalacakra*) becomes an integral part of the ecological aspects at various levels. Thereby a separate branch namely *Kalacakratantra* provides the means (*upaya*) how to equate the wisdom (*prajna*) for the unification of opposite factors like strong and weak, positive and negative, the male and the female principles of the universe. Again the retroversion (*paravritti*) towards the innate nature (*sahaja*) of the sentient beings prompts to quest for the Bliss (*ananda*) i.e. *Nirvana*, equating with the Buddhahood. Buddhism thereby widely aims to find out a universal habitat (*analaya*) after crossing the limitations of the narrow fencing of household life in spite of strict disciplinary control, how to observe with moment-wise mindfulness of body, speech, mind and that of the phenomenal world around.

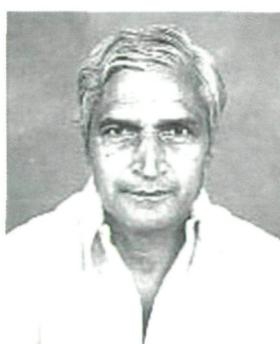
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<sup>24</sup> The Buddhist Tantra texts use a separate norm for the interpretation of the spherical context.

<sup>25</sup> *Manjushrimulakalpa-tantra* devotes some chapters on cosmological relevance for observance of specific Tantra rituals: 'At the midnight of full moon (on a hill top or in solitude) placing the painted scroll (of the deity) before a fireplace, a practitioner performs the fire ritual with white sandal wood, camphor and *kumkum* (saffron) together to propitiate unification (with the cosmic world); so then the beams of rays spread around being radiant with the colours of the deity in the painted scroll.' Darbhanga ed. P. 56. 1. 4-8. See also chapters XVIII and XXIV of the same text.

The Vedic *ritam*, the physical principle in interactive relation of the phenomenal existence and their cycles of movement in the universe becomes epitheted as *samata* or equity in spheres by the Buddhists. Scientists discover a speck-like ‘super-force’ as an indeterminate resource of existent phenomena in the universe to control. The Buddha's silence thus appears meaningful explicitly.

In the context of ecological harmony in cycles of the moveable beings presumably refers to die retroversion process of relativity (*ashraya-paravritti*). Ratnakarashanti (11<sup>th</sup> cent.) in the *Manjushri-nama-samgiti kha-sama* commentary clarifies the above retrovertive process as a wholesome relativity in physical phenomena inclusive of the sentient beings (*sattva*).<sup>26</sup> That-ness (*tathata*) of both the constituted and the unconstituted phenomena may thus resemble to be the ‘super-force’ as discovered by our scientific experiments. A Buddhist's ecological purview reaffirms the physical dependent relativity by the sequence of dependent origination (*pratitya samutpada*) which presumably is a new focus on physical cycles (*ritam*) of interdependent phenomenal continuous interactions in the universe with their determinable motions in the passage of time (*kala*).<sup>27</sup> A Buddhist prayer for ecological harmony is: ‘Let all sentient beings be happy.’



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<sup>26</sup> *Khasama-tika* p. 232, *Manjushri-nama-samgiti*. *Ashraya*, a dependent shelter is of the animate body which is threefold: made of primary elements as base (*dhatu*), processing as path (*marga*) to cleanse impurities of the base, phenomenal coherence (*dharmya*) through retroversion (*paravritti*) as the spontaneous (law of the universe).

<sup>27</sup> *Vimalaprabha* commentary (ascribed to a Kalki Pundarika) of *Laghu-Kalacakra tantram* refers *kala-cakra*, ‘wheel of time’, to symbolized descriptions. *Ka*: the prime causation to constitute a phenomenon, *la* (*laya*) with the drawing transforming of the cause to effect(s), as a process of liquidating of that which is generated *sambhara te praja ca*: the fickle mind and *ka* is the tie to put the above three in order.

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