Chapter-5

Ecological Implications in the Jain and the Buddhist texts

The heterodox tradition like Jainism and Buddhism are also replete with deep ecological concern. It seems relevant that we explore the viewpoints of the great seers like Lord Mahāvīra and the Buddha to find suggestions for effective handling of the present worldly situation and enable a peaceful existence of all living creatures on this planet. The study of this chapter has been done into two (2) sections revealing the Jain outlook towards nature and environment in the first section of our study and the Buddhist approach towards nature and environment in the next section.

5.1 Ecological Implications in the Jain texts

The ecological concern that we find in other ancient texts of India is also traceable in Jainism. Consideration of ecology brings up certain problems that are identified as global ecological crisis. We are all aware of the nature of this crisis. It is considered that the calamity we are facing in recent times is not a natural one but is actually caused by the actions and attitudes of human beings. Harm is caused to environment because man considers himself superior to the rest of nature. This attitude is responsible for all sorts of human chauvinism. What is then required for protection of the natural world is a healthy relation between man and nature.

We can have an idea of what environmental concern means if we look at the Jain philosophy. It will be evident in course of our study how the Jains advocate an ecocentric approach towards the world around where all living as well as non-living parts of nature have been given the same moral standing. It is so because the Jains acknowledge the presence of consciousness not just in the sentient world but also in the elements of nature that are
otherwise considered as inanimate. Being endowed with the quality of consciousness, the Jains maintain that these elements also have the same capacity to experience pleasure as well as pain. Jain ecology therefore suggests that we respect the earth-body (i.e. earth bodied creatures as soil, lava, chalk etc), fire-body (i.e. fire bodied creatures as shooting stars, lightning etc), air-body (i.e. air bodied creatures as dense winds, whirlwinds etc), water-body (i.e. hail, dew, rainwater etc) etc. for they are all considered to be non-different from human bodies in respect of their equal capacity to suffer. As a result, the Jains exhibit their deeper anxiety for the protection of nature in its entirety and recommend attitude that favors the well-being and care of the natural world. Consequently, it will become clear that the relation between humans with the rest of nature which as we have stated earlier stands at par with human beings and is conceived by the Jains from the basic point of ahimsā or non-violence. The emphasis on the quality of ahimsā in Jainism undoubtedly seems to go a long way in determining the position of man and his relation to the environment. And a search for the root of the idea of ahimsā takes us to the Jain understanding of the universe which advocates respect for all forms of life. Reverence for all life forms makes the Jains far more sensitive towards the outer world. Further, the ontology proposed by the Jains will also oblige us to respect the life forms of all kinds. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that a definite moral code of conduct is dictated in the Jain tradition and this in fact stems from their very deeper inquiry into the life and existence of man and the relation that he bears with nature. The texts like Daśavaikālika Sūtra, Ācārāṇga Sūtra, Jīva Vicāra Prakaraṇam throw light on the deep ecological concern embedded in the Jain thought.

We would first propose to discuss the outlook of the Jains towards this vast undivided universe. Their holistic vision will suggest us a better dealing with the outer world.
The Jains assert that the universe has neither a beginning nor an end. For the Jains, there is no intelligent first cause as the creator of this vast universe. They divide this universe into two everlasting, uncreated, independent and co-existent categories viz. the Jīva and the Ajīva. The Self or the Jīva is sentient, incorporeal, immaterial conscious being whereas the Ajīva is non-sentient, non-physical inert entity possessing the sensual characteristics like touch, smell, taste and colour. The Jains consider that there are five substances of Ajīva. They are as follows—

(i) dharmāstikāya- the medium of motion
(ii) adharmāstikāya- the medium of rest
(iii) ākāśastikāya- space
(iv) pudgalāstikāya- matter
(v) kāla- time

Spirit (jīva), matter (pudgala), motion (dharma), rest (adharma) and space (ākāśa) are described as astikaya substances or dravyas that possess constituent parts extending in space. Time or kāla on the other hand is the only anastikaya dravya that has no extension in space.

Dharma and adharma are taken by the Jains in the technical sense of the conditions of movements and rest and not in the well-accepted sense of merit and demerit. Like space and time, they are also eternal and imperceptible. They are formless and passive. Dharma cannot generate motion. Further, adharma cannot also arrest motion. They only help or favour motion or rest similar to water that helps the motion of fish.

Matter is called pudgala because it is liable to integration and destruction. Matter has form and consists of individual atoms or paramāṇu and conglomerate of atoms or skandhas that can be touched, tasted, heard and seen. In contrast, the Jīva or the Self is formless but when this soul is subject to the inflow of kārmic ‘dust’ or āsravas, it takes the form of a body. The embodied soul
then remains in bondage until it enjoys or suffers the results of past actions by which time other actions have drawn more kārmic ‘dust’ to the soul. It is considered that all souls are subject to this kārmic bondage with the exception of the Ever-Perfect and the Liberated who have overcome the passions which causes flow of kārmic ‘dust’ which binds the soul.

For the Jains, the Jīvas are all qualitatively alike (as they are all endowed with consciousness) and only quantitatively different (in respect of their ability of sense perception) and the whole universe is considered to be filled with them. The Jain evolutionary theory is thus a gradation of physical bodies possessing souls according to the degree of sensory perception. The highest position is occupied by man consisting of five senses and the lowest form of bodies are beings in possession of only one sense i.e. the sense of touch. Sānti Sūri, a noted Jain, has categorized the one-sensed beings as-

(i) The Earth-bodied beings or Prthivīkāyika Jīvas include lava, coral, soil, chalk, salt etc. (Jīva Vicāra Prakaraṇam 3-4).

(ii) The Water-bodied beings include underground water, dew, ice, hail, rainwater etc. (Jīva Vicāra Prakaraṇam 5).

(iii) The Fire-bodied beings or Agnikāyika Jīvas include lightning, shooting stars, fire reflected in the sky etc. (Jīva Vicāra Prakaraṇam 6).

(iv) The Wind-bodied beings or Vāyuṇkāyika Jīvas include dense winds, rarified winds, whirlwinds etc. (Jīva Vicāra Prakaraṇam 7).

(v) The Plant bodied beings are those which include roots, flowers, trees, creepers etc.

It is considered that all the above one-sensed beings experience suffering through their sense of touch. In question to whether the earth-bodied beings also have equal feeling of
suffering, Mahāvīra maintains that the earth-bodied beings do not possess any conscious mind (asamjñā). As a result, they experience pleasure and pain (vedana) in an indeterminate way or in lack of positive knowledge (anidāna). It is to be noted in this context that the Ācārāṅga Sūtra considers that though harm to the one-sensed earth beings may not be visible yet a person can hurt them and cause them to suffer by cutting, striking and killing them (Ācārāṅga Sūtra 1.1). K.C Lalwani in his comment to the view of Mahāvīra as stated above, says-

The indeterminateness of pain is signified by the word anidāna. This is so because of wrong outlook and absence of reasoning for which, like one under the spell of a drug or drink, they do not know what they are suffering from, and how much is their suffering. They accept their suffering as fait accompli and are used to it. The same applies to the other one-sensed beings.¹

Apart from the capacity to suffer, the Jains also acknowledge the presence of four instincts even in the one-sensed beings such as – craving for food (although the intake is involuntary in contrast to voluntary consumption by the two-sensed beings based on the sense of touch), fear, desire to reproduce and the desire to accumulate things for future use.

It then seems justified to advise that a true mendicant should abstain from harming these one-sensed immobile beings and also prevent others from harming them (Ācārāṅga Sūtra 1.176-1.177).

Now, apart from the one-sensed immobile beings that are believed to experience pleasure and pain, the Jains also acknowledge the existence of the two-sensed mobile beings. These two sensed mobile beings (possessing the sense of touch and taste) include termites, worms, leeches among others; the three-sensed mobile beings (possessing the sense of touch, taste and smell) include centipede, bedbugs, lice, ant and various other insects. (Jīva Vicāra Prakaraṇam 15, 16, 17). The mobile
beings possessing four senses i.e. sense of touch, taste, smell and sight include scorpions, bees, mosquitoes, spiders etc. (Jīva Vicāra Prakaraṇam 35). Among the five-sensed mobile beings are infernal beings (these beings are denizens of hell), higher animals (they are the “mindless” sentient beings), human beings (who have the capacity to attain kevala or liberation) and heavenly beings (which include God or paramātman who have already attained liberation from the kārmic cycle).

Therefore, we see that apart from the one-sensed immobile beings, the other mobile beings are also considered to experience pleasure and pain similar to that of a human being. As a result, it is not difficult to understand that human beings despite of possessing the highest number of senses have not been placed by the Jains in the center of any moral position. The Jains very much like a biocentrist considers that every being wills to live which is manifested in their biological processes of growth, development, propagation and sustenance.

It seems clear then that the Jain evolutionary theory displays a greater amount of anxiety for all forms of life by admitting in them the existence of the capacity to suffer. As a result, ahiṃsā or non-violence becomes an all-encompassing moral principle for the Jains that proposes greater restriction on outward conduct to ensure physical well-being to every life form.

In the Daśāvalkālīka Sūtra we come across a verse that goes as-

Tatthimaṁ paśhamaṁ thāṇaṁ mahābīreṇa desiyauṁ/
Ahiṃsā niuoṣaṁ diṭṭhā sabbabhūesu saṁjamo// (240).

Here ahiṃsā or non-violence has been described as an attitude of restraint that one has to show to all jīvas.

There is similar reference to the attitude of non-violence in a few more verses in this Sūtra.
It is expressed in the verse that a non-violent will not kill nor encourage others to kill consciously or unconsciously any living thing.

There is even another verse which states-

Sabbe jībā bi icchānti jībabāṁ na marījjiūṃ/
Tanthā pāṇabahāṁ ghoraṁ niggaṁthā bajjayaṁti Ṉañī//

(242).

This verse points to the fact that all beings are fond of life. They like pleasure, hate pain, shun destruction and long to live. Life is dearer to all of them. Consequently, these sentient creatures should not be killed or treated with violence.

It seems evident that the principle of ahīṁsā in Jainism does not only stand for a negative principle like non-violence. It is in fact a philosophy of life that believes in the community of life—actually in the idea of a global family. Thus, it requires us to abstain from all sorts of violence towards every kind of life forms. As a result, ahīṁsā as a principle of respect for life actually amounts to an ecological principle where all living things are considered inter-related and object of veneration.

It is admitted in Jainism that a person who restrains himself from harming other creatures is easily emancipated from his own sufferings. The nature of ahīṁsā expressed in the Ācārāṅga Sūtra explains this concept of interconnectedness of life through the identification of the killer and the killed. It is said-

Tumaṁsi nāma sacceva jham’hantavvam’ti mannasi,
tumaṁsi, nāma jam’ajjāveyavvam’ti manasi, tumaṁsi
nāma sacceva jam’uddaveyavvam’ti mannasi

(Ācārāṅga Sūtra 1.5.4).
This verse expresses how the attitude of non-violence creates an identity between killer and the killed or between self and self.

It is accepted by the Jains that the person or the object, which you intend to kill, tyrannize, punish and drive away, is none but yourself. When you torment others, you are the person who is actually tormented. The enlightened person consequently neither kills nor causes other to kill. What we call bondage and emancipation are all within ourselves. (Ācārāṅga Sūtra 1.1.5.101-2; 3.1.5.2.36).

We have noticed earlier how the kārmic ‘dust’ or āsrasas binds the soul to this physical world and we experience sufferings according to our past actions. The gradations of souls in this evolution are in fact the different stages of lives that beings experience according to the karmas they have exhibited. Consequently, any violence if committed to the other lower beings binds the soul to the body. Hence, it is clear then that bondage and emancipation are in the hands of an individual itself. He is then left with a choice whereby he can overcome the fetters of sin by displaying rational behaviour towards all other life forms. Lord Mahāvīra says that we should understand that just as we want to live, other creatures on this planet have the same longing for life. Hence, it is necessary that one exhibit rational behaviour towards other creatures for in doing so one indirectly gets benefited from such an act. There is a verse that reflects such an idea. The verse goes as-

Sabbabhūyappabhūyassa sammaṁ bhūyai paśa/
Piḥiyāsabassa daṃtassa pābaṁ kammaṁ na baṃdhaiḥ/
(verse 63, 4th chapter, Ṣadāvibhūsika, Daśavākalika Sūtra).

It is considered here that one who sees all beings as part of his own self, for him it becomes easier to restrict the flow of kārmic matter (āsra) towards the soul. It is so because he can easily feel the pain of other living creatures and refrains from actions that are harmful to them. Consequently, he is not bound into any sinful actions.
The Jains firmly believe that all sorts of harmful actions cause one to bind unwholesome varieties of karmas (pāpa prakṛtis) which include not only karmas that produce pain (asāta-vedanīya karma) but also those karmas that cause rebirth as animals (triyaṇīca) or hell beings (nārakī). This interrelatedness and coherence of all life forms will indeed compel man with an inescapable moral responsibility to respect and care all other creatures on this planet.

The coherence of all beings in nature visible in this tradition will also be seen to be proposed by the Buddha. This understanding will certainly encourage man to discard violence towards other forms of life. Consequently, non-violence seems to get sufficient ground to be reared on the understanding of an inseparable state of existence in this heterodox tradition.

Reverence for all life forms in Jainism and prescription of ahiṃsā actually expands the domain of our moral concern from the human to the other non-human beings. In the Western world, we find environmentalists expressing that non-human creatures are not to be harmed because they have the ability to experience pleasure and pain. J.B.Calicott and Paul Taylor are the exponents of this view. When we come to Jainism, we find that all nature has been supposed to have an intrinsic value (valuable in itself and not valued for its uses), which gives them some kind of moral standing. For the Jains, we have seen that the elements of nature like the earth, water, fire, air that are otherwise considered as non-sentient have also been supposed to have moral consideration in their own right. It is seen that even the one-sensed being like the earth stands in need of nourishment in order to stay alive. All beings thus constituted are to take a phrase from Taylor, ‘teleological centers of life.’ An organisms telos (the Greek word standing for ‘end’, ‘goal’) is believed to reach a state of maturity and to reproduce. Naturally, such creatures should not be treated with violence.

The Jains thus exhibit a sense of equanimity in their dealing with the other non-human parts of nature. It is truly noteworthy that for the Jains there is no sense of discrimination between
different beings and the elements of nature. The earth, water, fire, air are also considered to have the capacity to experience pleasure and pain. The only difference is found in the number of senses they exhibit. Hence, acknowledging life also in these natural elements and exhibiting equal veneration towards them is a unique feature in the Jain tradition. This helps them to gradually transcend the boundaries of biocentrism and embrace the philosophy of ecocentrism. This significant outlook of the Jains bears with it the message towards preservation of ecological balance.

From equal consideration of all life forms emerges a deeper amount of sensitivity among the Jains in dealing with the rest of nature. This is evident in their prohibition of killing and torturing of any life-forms. In case of higher animals, the Jains display carefulness in conduct by strictly prohibiting the habit of flesh consumption. It is considered that the desire to live and grow at the expense of another's life is not at all a justified humane dealing. The modern world today is also taking into note the adverse effect of meat consumption. The director of the Institute of Mathematics and Economics in Paris, Francois Peroux, states that if meat and alcohol consumption can be reduced by 50%, there would remain enough grains to solve the problem of hunger and malnutrition in the Third World. This is so because rearing of a huge number of animals for the taste of their flesh requires a huge quantity of grains to feed them. Moreover, Francis Peroux has also accepted the adverse effect of such consumption. Therefore, he expresses his suggestion in favour of a vegetarian lifestyle.

We find Lord Mahāvīra prescribed a vegetarian way of life long time back. The only difference is that Francois Peroux proposes a deliberate restriction on meat consumption. It is perhaps because he takes into note the harmful and undesirable effect it produces on human health and also on the problem of food stock in the world as whole. Whereas in case of Mahāvīra, the call for vegetarianism is a very natural process that stems from the realization of an inseparable bonding prevailing between human beings and other creatures. The acceptance of a
vegetarian life-style can be considered as a double-edged weapon. On the one hand, it will help to purify the inner nature of man by restricting his sensual demands. In other way, it will help to save many innocent creatures which otherwise fall a prey to human greed - a significant step to tackle species extinction.

The Jains consider that there is no reason to think that humans are superior to other creatures. The only difference that distinguishes man from other living creatures is that man has the capacity to attain kevala-jñāna i.e. can get liberated from the beginning less cycle of death and rebirth. And in order to come out of this cycle, he is required to undertake certain physical and mental austerities. These austerities require that he abstains from all sorts of destructive actions which otherwise would prevent him from realizing the true nature of his soul. Therefore, the ethical conduct of the Jains ultimately originates from a holistic approach towards life and world.

It is considered in Jainism that human beings who have the prospect of spiritual well-being cannot attain their purpose of life without the physical well-being of all life forms. The spiritual well-being of a person is intimately connected with the physical well-being of every life. The Jains therefore believe that the function of each soul is to help the other-'Parasparopagraho jīvānā'. As one will see others as non-separated from oneself, an ecological insight will emerge from the realization of the sanctity of all forms of life. The sanctity of all life-forms and a consequent ecological consideration will thus encourage an individual to adhere to the following norms (i) avoid injury to all creatures(savve pāṇā na hantavā), (ii) never command any creature, (iii) never own any creature, (iv) never employ any creature as your servant (savve pāṇā na pariggahetavā).

Lord Mahāvīra says that if we are aware of all your actions and of everything we do in relation to other living things, we can remain in perfect harmony with the natural world that will thereby generate spirituality. The idea of the interconnection of spiritual well-being and physical well-being can be easily understood from the practice of forgiveness that one asks from
all beings towards which harm have been done. This is called Pratikramaṇa. The Jains have the practice to recite a prayer of Pratikramaṇa before sunset through which they actually repent for the sin of violence committed by them during the day. The real point in Pratikramaṇa is that violence to any object of nature actually amounts to violence to oneself. When we do harm to any aspect of nature, we also harm ourselves. This clearly reveals that there was a deeper sense of Environmental Ethics in Indian thought. Actually, behind this prayer is a holistic view of environment that strives to expand our sphere of moral consideration.

We have reflected earlier how their sensitivity towards the surrounding appreciates the quality of non-violence. In fact, we can say that the spirit of ahiṃsā gets a free play in Jain understanding of the universe where there is a place of existence for every single aspect of nature. Therefore, while it is clear enough how the Jains display non-violence towards animals, their compassion towards other lower beings is also evident in their daily chores. Care of the plant kingdom is visible in the system of the Jains to cook only the amount that is required from plants without spoiling or wasting them. This idea is indeed an effective step towards preservation of the nature’s green. Not only this, Mahāvīra even advised his disciples not to consume root vegetables as he considered that such an act would result in uprooting of the whole plant. Concern even for the minute life forms is reflected in cleanliness of the Jains in food preparation as well as consumption. This was done so as not to attract insects that might be unknowingly killed. This idea can also help to ensure hygiene in our daily activities. This tradition even has the practice of not eating in dark so that several tiny creatures might not be killed. Further, straining of drinking water and then boiling and drinking is another way of showing concern even for the lower forms of life.
The Jain tradition thus undoubtedly enlarges the domain of their family to incorporate nature in its entirety. The love and compassion that they exhibit towards the world around encourages a radical shift from the mainstream human thinking. It seriously refuses any sort of anthropocentric propensity and proposes a well-nurtured philosophy towards life and world. The outlook that the Jains suggest is undeniably that of an ecocentrist. As a result, there is no isolated state of existence of any object in nature. The Jains through their deep reverence successfully beads every single aspect of nature in one single thread. This line of thought bears a significant resemblance with the ‘relational, total-field image’ proposed by the Western Environmentalists. It is this cosmic vision that can help us to tackle the disasters that we are facing in our environment.

Thus, we find that in Jain cosmology there is a clear call for respect towards the entire environment. Therefore, humans are required to display reciprocity i.e. should take up responsibilities for sustaining and preserving nature. Hence, ahimsa or non-violence is the universal moral code prescribed for the entire human race.

Further, the ontology of the Jains also provide a very strong platform for non-violence to become the universal moral principle. It is undeniable that violence is at the root of crisis in our environment. We indulge in destructive violence because we are often dogmatic and fail to recognize that there is no absolute truth. It is when we believe that our epistemological claims make the whole of truth, we are engaged in selfish aggression towards nature and environment. It is in this critical state of things that this tradition offers a humanitarian method of synthesis. As violence proceeds from intolerance grounded on ideological absolutism, ahimsa therefore requires a platform for tolerance and such is believed to be latent in the philosophy of Anekantavada. The Jain Tirthankaras taught this sublime method thousands of years ago.
(b) Anekāntavāda: A Way to Spiritual Unity of Mankind

It is indeed a very crucial point as to what the Jains can do when we are experiencing a serious ethical crisis. Our history so far has proved that we cannot restore world peace by the power of guns. It has only resulted in fragmentation and division. As fire can never extinguish fire, similarly wars can never end wars. Therefore, we have to search for the way to unity of mankind elsewhere. The search ends in the all-encompassing philosophy of Anekāntavāda. The spirit of the Jain ontology clearly says that- If one ignores the various attributes of a substance and considers one as the sole attribute, he will never realize the truth of it. Hence, it is necessary to comprehend fully well the significance and meaning of Anekānta (logic) as defined by the prefix Syād (somehow).

Anekāntavāda proposes that every object possesses indefinite aspects. Reality is many-faced. Hence, Anekāntavāda seems to answer to the diverse epistemological perspectives. This is in fact essential to end all fractions that arise due to self-conceit of one-sided knowledge. The one-sidedness of our epistemological perspective goes a long way to show that our ethics cannot be an ethics of non-violence. It is when we learn to consider other diverse perspectives, we can learn to shake off intolerance and violence. In fact, Anekāntavāda provides the ground of Jain ethics that practically gives us a philosophy of non-violence. If we give up epistemological absolutism and embrace the theory of Anekāntavāda, we can get a foundation on which ahīṃsā can be reared. As a matter of fact, it can be said that Anekāntavāda is the ideological basis for the philosophy of ahīṃsā. Consequently, it is not wrong to say that man’s dealing with nature is dictated in Jain philosophy by their epistemology and ethics. It obliges us to respect nature in all its aspect. Existence is taken in Anekāntavāda to be many-sided. Therefore, there is no reason why the perspective of a single individual should be the dominating perspective. Umāsvāti remarks-
"A person with a deluded world-view is like an insane person who follows arbitrary whims and cannot distinguish true from false."³

It is true that we cannot deny the fact that every individual is independent to think and act. Anekāntavāda does not want to seize the independence in thinking and acting. It seems to deepen as well as enlarge the sphere of our thinking by providing the remarkable spirit of synthesis. In this respect, Anekāntavāda shows way to an understanding of the whole of reality. Thus, it becomes an indispensable instrument for restoration of world peace and world unity.

Anekāntavāda, which is really a metaphysical thesis, is supported by the theory of naya and the "seven-fold scheme of qualified predication." Anekāntavāda together with its basis, nayavāda (doctrine of partial truths) gives us a philosophy of tolerance. For the Jains, intolerance has its root in the absolutistic ideas which is the seed of violence. If we cling to Ekāntavāda or one-sided absolutism, we will tend to create only fractions. Nayavāda does away with the problem that arises out of ekānta or one-sided view. Nayas are the points of view from which things are considered. They are partial views of reality and are inadequate to explain the whole of reality. Nayavāda is in fact considered to be a corollary of Anekāntavāda.

Another corollary of Anekāntavāda is Syādvāda. Syādvāda is complementary to that of Nayavāda. The method that Nayavāda adopts is analytical in nature whereas in case of Syādvāda it is a synthetical method. Syādvāda explores the various aspects of truth as analyzed by the Nayavāda and integrates them into a consistent and comprehensive whole. Every strand of truth delivered by naya referred to as predication or modes is called bhanga. Saptabhangi is the theory of seven-fold predications and is identical with Syādvāda as the number of possible judgement considered under the conditional method of Syādvāda are seven only.
For the Jains, there is no absolute truth. They are all true under certain conditions. It is for this reason that every judgement has been asked by the Jains to be qualified by the word ‘Syāt’. The word, ‘Syāt’, means ‘in some respect’ or ‘in a certain context.’ We should not reject ‘syāt’ for that would amount to the endorsement of unwarranted absolutism which is directly contradicted by experience.

As a matter of fact, everything exists from the point of view of its own substance, space, time and form and does not exist from the point of view of another substance, space, time and form. So it is misleading to say that something exist in the sense that it exists absolutely and unconditionally. An object has got innumerable characteristics of which we can know only some. Our knowledge is relative and fragmentary. A pot for example exists in its own matter i.e. clay and does not exist in another matter. Hence, the pot is both existent and non-existent. Since, such a statement is made from different standpoints, it involves no contradiction.

The Jains distinguish seven forms of judgement. Each judgement is relative and so it is preceded by the word, ‘syāt’. The seven forms of judgement are as follows-

(a) Syādasti : Relatively, a thing is real. From the point of view of its own substance, space, time and nature, a thing exists.

(b) Syādnāsti: Relatively, a thing is unreal. From the point of view of substance, space, time and nature, a thing does not exist as other things.

(c) Syādasti nāsti: Relatively, a thing is both real and unreal. The jar exists as having its own substance, place, time and nature but it does not exist as another substance, in another place, at another time and having another quality.

(d) Syādavaktavyam: Relatively, a thing is indescribable. The presence of its own nature and absence of its contradictory nature are both present in an object. But it becomes difficult
to express it. But it is to be noted that it cannot be said to be absolutely indescribable.

(e) Syād asti ca avaktavyam: Relatively a thing is real and is indescribable. When a predicate is affirmed of a thing with regard to its own nature, substance, place, time and a predicate is affirmed of it as described above and denied of other things as different substances in other place, in other times and with different natures simultaneously, we have affirmation and indescribability.

(f) Syādāṇāsti ca avaktavyam: Relatively, a thing is unreal and is indescribable. When a predicate is denied of other substances, in other times, places and with different natures and a predicate is simultaneously affirmed of the thing and denied of other things, we have negation and indescribability.

(g) Syādastī ca nāsti ca avaktavyam: Relatively, a thing is real, unreal and indescribable. When a predicate is affirmed of a thing as having its own nature, its own time, its own place, and it is denied of other substances, in other places, in other times and with other natures, and affirmation and denial are made simultaneously, we have affirmation, negation and indescribability.

Thus, we find that Anekāntavāda supported by the theory of naya and seven-fold scheme of qualified predication has an underlying ethical implication for it does away with one-sided absolutism and with it the seed of violence and intolerance. This is so because Anekāntavāda is a symbol of open mindedness and non-attachment to one's own view and respect for the views of others. This respect has some important ecological significance. Tolerance towards other perspective makes room for the respect for nature or different life-forms that exist on this planet. It can hardly be denied that tolerance is the foundation of harmony and peace. Anekāntavāda fosters intellectual ahimsā thus emancipating man from the shackle of pre-conceived notions. It
thus appears that Anekāntavāda generates compassion and the feeling of non-violence and equality.

Hence, it becomes easier to rise above discords and imbibe a cosmo-centric outlook that can do away with all sorts of fragmentation in the society and the world as a whole. Eventually, we will aim at a better way to deal with the present crisis in our environment. Therefore, just as the Jain understanding of the universe so also the Jain Anekāntavāda favors a ‘relational, total-field image’ through a successful synthesis of all thoughts. This holistic vision is a way to a life of non-violence towards the entire world. Consequently, we can say that the ontology of the Jains also provides a platform for the universal moral principle, ahimsā to thrive.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that this heterodox tradition does not separate the world of nature from the world of moral order. The birth of the Jīva at different order of existence is decided by the karmas done at their previous births. As a result, the Jain evolutionary theory enlarges the domain of concern to include the elements of nature as possessing consciousness. Hence, humans do not enjoy any privileged position in the Jain understanding of the cosmos. He is required to display equanimity in his dealing with every aspect of nature as they are felt endowed with life. This holistic approach confirms a non-destructive attitude towards the world as a whole. It helps man to rise above discords and discriminations encouraged by anthropocentrism. As a matter of fact, the Jains, lay bare their philosophical instrument, Anekāntavāda which harmonizes all thoughts with the spirit of synthesis. Therefore, ‘Ahiṃsā Paramo Dharmāh’ is the moral principle proposed by this tradition for the entire human race.

**5.2 Ecological Implications in the Buddhist Texts**

Buddhism may also be primarily looked upon as propagating the teaching of ahiṃsā or non-violence. The quality like non-violence teaches man a non-aggressive dealing with the
natural environment. A sense of aggression in attitude towards every object in nature is visible in human-centric outlook dominant in the Western tradition. As a result, the non-human world is thrown outside the orbit of any ethical consideration. It is humanity that is believed to reign supreme on this planet and nothing wrong is considered to be committed by man if he exploits nature to serve his selfish demands. We have noticed in our earlier chapters as to how this faulty and unjustifiable perception of man’s relation with nature to be at the root of our present day ecological crisis. Therefore, like the heterodox school of Jainism (discussed in the first section), the Buddhist heterodox tradition will also offer significant message to combat this grave disaster. The ideas in the Sutta Nipāta, Dīgha Nikāya, Dhammapada, Samyutta Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya may inspire us to action beneficial for the protection of our environment.

In Buddhism, we experience a very fine clubbing of attitude towards nature and natural environment with morality. It was perhaps because the Buddha had the conviction that a moral transformation brings a very positive impact on individual’s behavior towards the external world. Therefore, we will notice how Buddhism tries to address the crisis in the environment by pointing to the correction of man’s perception of reality as a whole. And such is believed to be grounded on the realization that man in fact is a part and parcel of this grand cosmos. This cosmo-centric vision whereby man can understand his true place in the entire scheme of nature is manifested in the Central Doctrine of the Buddha i.e. Pratītyasamutpāda. It will be evident then how this doctrine will aim at providing us with a philosophical tool to tackle the degradation in environment. The conception of both ecology and Pratītyasamutpāda express the fact that there is no independent existence in this universe. Each and everything is related to the other. It is this realization of mutual dependence that will motivate man to live in harmony with his environment.

In Buddhism we notice a deep awareness of the conditions that improve or degrade the outer environment. For the Buddha, this vast universe is an undivided and seamless whole. Human existence and destiny are all inextricably linked with the
environment. Our biased approach towards life and world thus has to be rectified in order to build a better and healthier relation with nature. We therefore begin our exploration with the far-reaching application of the Buddha’s insight into Pratītyasamutpāda.

(a) Pratītyasamutpāda and its Ecological Implications

The Buddha was deeply moved by humans suffering at the sight of disease, old age, death and all other miseries to which a man is subject to. He spent years in meditation, penance and study to discover the origin of human sufferings as well as means to overcome them. At last, he received enlightenment in the form of what is known as “Four Noble Truths” (Catvāri-ārya-satyaṇī). The Four Noble truths are- there is suffering, there is cause of suffering, there is cessation of suffering and there is path leading to cessation of suffering.

It is true that all Indian thinkers recognize suffering although they are not unanimous regarding how this malady can be removed. The Buddha discovered this malice in his conception of Dependent Origination or Pratītyasamutpāda that comes under the Second Noble truth. The doctrine proclaims a causal relationship of all things and events in this phenomenal creation. One phenomenon determines the nature and function of the other phenomenon. A verse from the Buddhist text says-

Asmin sati idam bhavati.
Asmin nā sati idam nā bhavati/
(Majjhima Nikāya I.134).

Everything in this universe depends upon a condition and ceases to exist when the condition disappears.

There is no effect without a cause and no cause without an effect. The Buddha attached so much importance to the understanding of this theory that he calls this the Dhamma. This causal principle according to the Buddha is considered to pervade the whole of this universe- both in the physical realm as well as in
the mental realm. Hence, everything stands to be inextricably causally related to the other. Nothing exists separately. No species— even the human species can place itself outside the wheel of this universe. The insight of this interconnectedness will perhaps make man far more sensitive about his relation to the other parts of nature. He will learn to be morally committed to the well-being of other fellow beings on this planet. Hence, we see that the idea of interdependence latent in the doctrine of Pratītyasamutpāda actually results in a ‘grand related-functional-whole’ exactly akin to the ‘relational, total-field image’ professed by the Deep Ecologists in the West. This holistic understanding of life and the world undermines any sort of anthropocentrism and appreciates the spirit of harmony and equanimity.

We have seen how the doctrine teaches a causal origination of all things and events. Everything that we perceive possesses an existence depending on something else and that thing does not perish leaving some effect. Hence, we may say that the degradation in the environment has also not occurred by mere chance but has a definite cause behind. The causal principle is seen to be operative both in the physical and in the mental realm. Hence, actions done may also be said to presuppose certain pattern of thought. Buddhism highlights on the point that the main reason why man fails in any sort of emotional bonding with his environment lies in his self-centeredness. And in this false run to satiate all his selfish needs, he not only isolates himself from the rest of nature but also brings various unwanted sufferings on himself. It is perhaps for this reason that the Buddha considered that human nature plays a pivotal role in shaping the world around.

The Buddhist text like the Samyutta Nikāya asserts—
‘Cittena niyati loko’ (Samyutta Nikāya, I.39)
This verse points to the fact that the whole world is in fact led by mind.

As such, environmental crisis may be also to some extent looked upon as our own making. It is in this context we find the Buddha giving the message, ‘Cetanā bhikkava kammo vadāmi’ meaning that as we have created this unwanted and undesirable
situation, it is our own responsibility to remove it. Hence, it seems clear that the Buddha emphasizing on the causal origin of all things and events suggests that solution to the present environmental degradation and crisis may be attained if we direct our actions in the right path. Only when man will understand that he cannot escape the consequences of his evil actions as everything in this universe is inextricably linked, he will exhibit prudence in his outward behavior.

As such, we see that the need for a healthy man-nature relationship is implicit in the thought of Pratītyasamutpāda. It has helped us to understand that the root cause of our sufferings lie in the false perception of ourselves as having an isolated existence in nature. The consequence of this is fragmentation that not only disturbs our mental peace but also brings adverse effect on the outer environment. Such an exposition of truth in this doctrine seems to have a greater relevance in today’s world that is torn by discord, enmity and hatred.

It is interesting to state that the truth which the Buddha preached through his doctrine of Pratītyasamutpāda has been taken as a basis by Nāgārjuna to reach his concept of Śūnyatā.

(b) Nāgārjuna's Śūnyatā and its bearing on our environment

According to Nāgārjuna there is nothing in the world that can be regarded to have its own nature. An object can be considered to have its own nature if it comes to existence of its own i.e. without depending on any condition external to itself. However, this in fact is true of no object in the entire scheme of nature. There is therefore no object in this world that has its own nature. It is because of this that Nāgārjuna claims that every object is niḥ-svabhāva or nature less. This state of niḥ-svabhāvata is Śūnyatā for Nāgārjuna. In his opinion, the doctrine of Śūnyavāda can be understood in the light of Pratītyasamutpāda that advocates relational existence of all things in nature. It is perhaps for this reason that Nāgārjuna in the 24th chapter of Mādhyamika-Śāstra, declares the truth that one who sees Pratītyasamutpāda, sees Śūnyatā (Mādhyamika-Śāstra 24.18).
The concept of Śūnyatā has been variously interpreted by different philosophers. However, it is to be noted in this context that Śūnyatā as understood by Nāgārjuna is not to be considered either in the absolutistic sense (meaning something eternally exists independently of any condition) or in the nihilistic sense (meaning something existing can be annihilated or can cease to be). We come across clear reference to the denial of both these extreme viewpoints. We find Nāgārjuna saying—

Tatsmabhochchinnam nāpi sāsvaṭām
(Mādhyamika-Sāstra, 18.10).

This verse points to the fact that Śūnyatā gives us the knowledge of a relational existence of everything in this universe.

For Nāgārjuna, there is no dharma (character) of things which is not dependent on some other condition regarding its origin. It seems clear then that Śūnyatā only means the conditional character of things and their consequent changeability, indescribability or indeterminability. This outlook is called the middle path (madhyama mārga) as it avoids the extreme viewpoints i.e. by denying both absolute reality and absolute unreality of things and emphasizing a conditional existence of all things in this phenomenal creation. It is to be noted that the truth regarding the conditional state of existence of all things led Lord Buddha to call the Theory of Dependent Origination as the middle path.

Nāgārjuna as such seems to have advocated the concept of Pratīyāsamutpāda. This is because of the fact that the only kind of existence that we can ascribe to things of this phenomenal world is relational existence. Nothing actually has its own nature since existence of things is essentially dependent. The fact that nothing has its own nature has been explained by Nāgārjuna with reference to his conception of four koṭis under which everything conceivable would come. The four koṭis are— satkoṭi, asatkoṭi, sadsatkoṭi and anuṣṭhayakoṭi. Things of the phenomenal world are understood as Śūnya since they cannot be brought under or understood from any of the four standpoints.
Nāgārjuna claims here that to understand Śūnyatā from any of the four standpoints is wrong.

A thing is understood as real if it is independent i.e. does not depend on anything else for its existence and origination. However, everything we know is dependent on some condition. Hence, an object cannot be called sat or real. Again, an object cannot be called unreal or asat. This is because an unreal thing like a castle in the air cannot ever come into existence. Further to say that an object is both real and unreal or that is neither real nor unreal would be an unintelligible jargon. This feature of phenomenon that they repel inclusion under any of the four categories is evidence for Nāgārjuna that everything is Śūnya i.e. devoid of a state of existence of its own.

It is to be noted that Nāgārjuna also adds a philosophy of noumenon i.e. reality in itself to this philosophy of phenomena (i.e. relational state of existence of all things). The Buddha’s teaching regarding Dependent Origination apply to this phenomenal world but when nirvāṇa is attained and ordinary sense-experiences ceases, one gradually realizes the true essence of reality devoid of change, conditionality and all other phenomenal characters. Nāgārjuna says that these in fact are the two truths on which the Buddha’s teaching of Dharma depends- one is the empirical and the other is the transcendental. It is considered that without having the knowledge of these two level of truths, one cannot understand the profound depth of the Buddha’s preaching (Mādhyamika-Śāstra, 8-9). This seems to be exactly akin to the truth embedded in our Upaniṣadic literature.

When we think of this phenomenal world, the only kind of nature that we can ascribe to a thing is relational. For an ecologist also there is no separate consideration for any creature. He comes to know the nature and function of a creature through its relation to other living and non-living parts of nature. Hence, we find that
the concept of ecology is applicable in the phenomenal state of existence (samyrti satya) and not to any phenomena over and above this world. And the principle that governs this phenomenal world is the principle of Dependent Origination. As a result, Šrīnyata having its root in the Central Doctrine of the Buddha will also bear significant message for environmental protection. It also asks man to exist peacefully with the other living and non-living parts of nature. When man will understand that he bears a relation with the other parts of nature, he will try to be cautious in his dealing with the outer world. He will then try to exhibit restraint in his sensual pleasures. It can hardly be denied that one of the ways by which we can protect nature is by prudently utilizing the resources of nature. If nature is exploited indiscriminately, it will also be a serious threat to our survival as we do have an isolated existence in nature. This understanding can motivate us to use the resources of nature to satisfy our basic needs and not to exploit beyond it. Such an endeavour might help us to combat the serious crisis in the environment. Therefore, Nāgārjuna’s concept of Šrīnyata also seems to ask mankind to come out of his shell of self-centeredness and adopt a broader perspective towards life and the world to mitigate the present day problems.

It is seriously believed in Buddhism that natural processes that occur are in fact affected by the morals of humanity. Moral degeneration brings about situations not only adverse to human well-being and happiness but also is unpleasant for the environment as a whole. This in fact suggests a close connection between human morality and the natural environment. This has been clearly revealed in the five natural laws (pañca niyama dhamma).

(c) The natural laws: an expression of reciprocity

The natural laws in the Buddhist literature have been divided as- utuniyama (season law), bijaniyama (seed law), cittaniyama (mind law), kammaniyama (action law) and dharmaniyama (phenomenal/universal law). These laws have been translated as ‘physical laws’, ‘biological laws’, ‘moral laws’
and ‘causal laws’ respectively. It is believed in Buddhism that while the first four laws work within their respective domain, the law of causality is operative ‘within each of them as well as between them.’ Lili de Silva writes-

This means that the physical elements, i.e. earth, water, air etc. affect the growth and development of biological components, i.e. flora and fauna. This, in turn, influences the thought patterns of the people, who interact with the flora and fauna. These thought pattern determine moral standards. The opposite process of interaction is also possible. The morals of humanity influence not only the psychological make-up of the people, but the biological and physical environment of the area as well. Thus, the five laws demonstrate that humanity and nature are bound in a reciprocal relationship with changes in one necessarily causing changes in the other.4

This goes on to prove the mutual interaction between man and environment in clear terms. The morals of humanity play a decisive role in shaping the world around. Thus, the Buddha gives us the idea that when humanity is demoralized with greed, famine is the inevitable result. Again, when moral degeneration happens due to ignorance, epidemic is the natural outcome. Further, when hatred is the demoralizing force, far-reaching violence is the unavoidable outcome. It is only when mankind will realize that degradation in environment has occurred due to his moral decline, a change in heart will take place. This might improve our worldly conditions for the better.

It was the conviction of the Buddha that life in the midst of nature leaves a very positive impact on the mental set-up of an individual. It is perhaps for this reason that the Buddha tirelessly propagated a life in harmony with the natural surroundings.

(d) Nature as means to one’s moral and spiritual development

The Buddha and his followers regarded the natural surrounding as a source of immense pleasure as well as aesthetic
satisfaction. Detached from worldly pleasures, this great seer searched for spiritual content in the tranquility of nature. It is perhaps for this reason that when we look into the deeper dimension of Buddhism, we come across a rich flora and fauna of the earth. The Buddha is known to have spent a very significant part of life in this part of the world. Nature therefore in Buddhism has been given the status of a great teacher infused with immense spiritual potential and is also a guide to our courses of life. The Buddha’s teachings were all imparted away from the hustle and bustle of life in the lap of nature. It might have been because of the fact the Buddha wanted to make his disciples feel a direct communion with the natural environment. It seems apt here to quote the sayings of one of the greatest philosophers of India, S. Radhakrishnan. He says—

“The huge forests with their wide leafy avenues afforded great opportunity for the devout soul to wander peacefully through them, dream strange dreams and burst forth into joyous songs. World-less weary men go out on pilgrimages into these scenes of nature to acquire inward peace, listening to the rush of winds and torrents, the music of birds and leaves, and return whole heart and fresh in spirit. It was in the āśramas and tapovanas or forest hermitages that the thinking men of India meditated on the deeper problems of existence.”

It may due to this innate spiritual potential in nature the Buddha spent his life in this part as a recluse to understand the true essence of human existence. In the Buddha’s life also we find vivid references to the importance of the plant world. We come across the names of trees like Śāl, Peepal, Nyagrodha, Bargad, Muchalinda (Barringtonia Acutangula) etc. The important incidents in the Buddha’s life took place in the natural surroundings. During the early days of his life, the Buddha is even learnt to have gone to a state of complete mental abstraction sitting under a Jāmūn tree in Kapilavastu. Besides this, he is also known to have preached dhamma to his five ascetics sitting under a banyan tree at Sārnāth. As this park was adorned with dark black trees, it was known as Aṅjana Vana or black forest. Apart
from this, many of the Vinaya laws are also known to have been made public in the Veluvana (bamboo forest) of Rājgrīha.

The names of different forests are not only the revelation of the importance of forest cover on earth but also their role in providing serenity and tranquility to one's moral and spiritual development. The positive impact that the natural surroundings leave on man's mind calls for a greater prudence in dealing with the world around and expressing care and concern for it. The Buddha could easily understand how there exists an intimate bonding between man and nature. Therefore, his teachings in nature's wilderness may be looked upon as bearing a very important message. The Buddha knew that a greater interaction of man with nature might help to gradually increase his sensitivity about the surroundings. This would in turn bring a significant change in his pattern of thinking thus encouraging him to work for the well-being of nature.

The Buddha not only asked his disciples to live in harmony with nature, he also has clear assertions that reflect his deep concern for the non-human sentient parts of nature. We come across definite instructions of the Buddha regarding behavior that one should exhibit towards the plant as well as the animal kingdom.

(e) Attitude towards the plant world

One of the important members of our biotic world is the plant kingdom. However, with progress of time, our earth has been losing its rich green cover thus resulting in several undesirable occurrences in nature's play. It is therefore necessary that we make an endeavor to protect our forests. In the Sutta-Nipāta we come across a verse which goes as:

Arrannakani senasanani, pantani appasaddani,
Bhajitabbani minina, etam samanassa patirupam
(Sutta-Nipāta, 149).
In the above verse we find Lord Buddha urging the monks to protect forests.

Such a proclamation made by the Buddha seems to throw light on the necessity of forests and their role in maintaining ecological balance. The Buddha believed that life dwells in the plant kingdom and hence one should be very cautious about his behaviour towards them. His sensitivity towards the plant world gets vivid in various injunctions that he set for his monks. Shoes made of talipat leaves from Palmyra trees were prohibited as such use would result in reckless destruction of plant life. Prohibition was also imposed on wearing of shoes made of grass. The Vinaya Pitaka advise that one not to urinate, spit phlegm or saliva on green grass—(Vinaya Pitaka, II, 205-6). The Sutta-Nipāta in this context also declares—

Hi tvam brahmaṇa!
Taṅ pāyāsan appaharite vā chaddehi,
appanakevā udake opilapesi

It is said that one should not throw any left out food on green grass.

Apart from this, movement of monks was strictly restricted during rainy season to avoid harm to the vegetative as well as the tiny living world. Now, these injunctions undeniably reveal the Buddha’s deep ecological insight and an attitude of non-violence towards the natural world.

We have already understood what the Buddha intends to convey through his Central Doctrine. Therefore, man is not considered to reign supreme on this planet. In this vast creation as human beings make their place, the non-human living world also has an equal right to live. It is necessary then that we realize that we are like others subject to the same natural process and therefore only a member of this creation. As our lives are sustained by nature, we should also invest a part of our earnings for the protection and care of the environment. It is in this context, we come across the advice of the Buddha in the following verse which goes as—
An individual should divide his income into four equal parts. Half of his income he should utilize for himself and for his various household activities. Out of the remaining half part, one portion of his income he should spend for the benefit of the natural environment and the rest he should keep for times of crisis.

This verse talks of the provision that man should make for care and nurture of the natural world apart from his own well-being. Hence, the Buddha brings forth the message that man also has a sense of responsibility towards the world around. It is only when man will be aware of his responsibilities, he will stop polluting the environment. As such, the Buddha appreciated any act that would bring pleasant impact on the natural world. We find him encouraging his lay devotees for planting trees, constructing parks as well as pleasure groves as he considered that such activities would deviate them from harming nature. We therefore come across a verse in the Buddhist text that says-

Ārāmaropā vanaropā, ye janā setukārkā I
Papan ca Udpanm ca, ye dadanti upassayām II
Tesām divā ratto ca, sadā puññamā pavaḍhati I
Dhammatthā silasampannā, te janā saggagāmino II, Samyuthā Nikāya I, Vanaropasutta, 33.

It is considered that tree plantation as well as ensuring its protection are noble works and they bring immense benefit to mankind.

This kind of motivation towards plant care and its nurture calls for our greater participation in aforestation programme. This is perhaps one of the ways by which we might compensate the loss of greenery on our planet.
Buddhism lays bare the fact that a full grown tree purifies the breeze, provides fresh air for our survival and it also provides soothing shelter to the travellers. As such, the Buddha seriously condemned felling of trees. The Buddha looked upon it as a crime and he clearly stated that one who engages himself in such acts has to bear the consequence of his actions. The Buddha used the word ‘pācittiya’ (Vinaya Pitaka, Bhikkhu Patimokkha No.11; and Bhikkhuni Patimokkha No.47,) for felling or cutting of tree. According to Avinash Kumar Srivastava, it is very difficult to interpret the term but it can be understood that any injury done to trees is a ‘cognizable offence.’ The Sutta Nipāta (296-297) also states that a person should never tear branches of a tree that provides him shade to sit as well as to lie down for rest.

It is true that in the period of the Buddha there had not been the crisis of the thick foliage on earth. The Buddha’s views reflect how he unconditionally showered his deep love for the natural environment. The Buddha seriously considered that all living beings including trees and men have a common origin and they are also made up of common elements i.e., rūpa and arūpa dhātus. Rūpa dhātus are Prthvi, Apa, Tej and Van. Emotions, feelings etc are said to be made of arūpa dhātus. It is believed, that despite of rūpa and arūpa playing a significant role in the formation of the living kingdoms, they assume different forms in respect of human beings as well as the non-human sentient world. The difference between human and the non-human living world lie in respect of the elements (skandhas) they exhibit. Man is considered to be composed of five skandhas (pañcaskandha) namely- rūpa, skandha (corporeality), sāṃskara skandha (disposition), samjñā skandha (perception), vedana skandha (feeling) and vijñāna skandha (consciousness). The plant kingdom on the other hand is endowed with three skandhas that are rūpa, vedana and vijñāna. Hence, it is quite clear that the human world as well as the plant kingdom are endowed with common characteristics of form, warmness, and consciousness. This is expressed in the verse which goes as –
Katame ca bhikkave sankhitena pancupādāna-khandha...?

Seyyathidham rūpaṁpādaṁna-khandho, vedanā-
pādaṁna-khandho, saṁsainupādaṁna-khandho, saṁskhāropādaṁna-
khandho, viṁśatīnanupādaṁna-khandho. (Dīgha Nikāya; Mahā
Satipatthāna Sutta).

For the Buddha, all living creatures including mankind and plant
kingdom have a similar origin and they are composed of same
elements like the rūpa and arūpa dhātus. Hence, they are all
subject to have the fundamental properties like form, warmth as
well as consciousness.

From the above verse, it becomes clear that the plant
kingdom is possessed of corporeality, feeling and consciousness.
Hence, Buddhism shows how the plant world also experiences
pleasure and pain just like human beings but they are unable to
convey such feelings to others as they are devoid of saṁjñā and
saṁskāra. Therefore, it seems rather unethical and unwise to
deny moral consideration to the plant kingdom.

Buddhism therefore seriously condemns the concept of
‘Man-versus-Nature.’ It is our ignorance that motivates us to rule
over nature. All the undesirable effects that we are experiencing
in our environment are due to our thoughtless mastery over the
natural world. It cannot be denied that the resources of our planet
are not only becoming scarce but are also at random polluted by
men. The Buddha considers people who inflict harm and pollute
the environment as ‘wood-apple eaters.’ Modern men do not
know how to prudently utilize the products of nature. Lily de
Silva says,

‘A man shakes the branch of a wood apple tree and
the fruits, ripe as well as unripe fall. The man collects
only what he wants and leaves the rest to rot’.

This kind of exploitation of nature’s resources beyond one’s need
is seriously harming our planet.
When we study Buddhism, we find that the Buddha recommends a gentle and non-aggressive behaviour towards nature. In the Siṅgalasutta, we find the Buddha saying-

Bhoge sahharmanassā, bhamarasseva irīyato I. Bhogā Sannicayāṁ yanti, vammiko vupaciyaṁ II. Dīgha Nikāya III, 188.

It is stated that a householder should accumulate wealth as a bee collects nectar from flower to turn into honey. The bee collects nectar from flower but neither harms the fragrance nor the beauty of the flower.

All the above verses that we come across not only highlight the concern that Buddhism projects for the plant world but is also a message to mankind to exhibit rational behavior to this part of nature.

Now, apart from the Buddha’s detailed instructions that would ensure the well-being of the plant world, there are also significant ideas that can be utilized for the welfare of the animal kingdom.

(f) Attitude towards the animal world

The Buddha severely condemned killing of any living creatures on earth. Here we will see how the Buddha expressed in clear terms that man should discard the attitude of violence towards animals. It is said in the Dhammapada, 131, that all living beings long for happiness. Hence, any individual who inflicts injury on any creature does something that would deprive him of happiness here or hereafter.

It was the conviction of the Buddha that killing of any living beings is similar to eating and killing one’s own relatives and friends for we might have been birds or similar other lower animals in our previous births. The ‘Law of Karma’ is considered
to play a prominent role in Buddhism. Whatever acts we perform or whatever an individual thinks, constitute a sort of energy, force, whose effects will be felt one day, in this life or the other. That force, in turn will determine the quality of our future reincarnations. Hence, bad or negative karma will push us farther away from the final realization (Nirvāṇa) and we will tangle ourselves in the cycle of rebirths or saṃsāra. It seems clear then that the idea of reincarnation can bring a positive impact on one’s outward conduct. It leaves us with a choice whereby we can improve our quality of birth or even control our future birth by displaying rational behavior towards other fellow creatures. This will eventually minimize the pain and agony we unnecessarily bring to animals for satisfaction of our selfish greed. Therefore, understanding of karma and rebirth prepares the Buddhists to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards all animals. The concept of merit that we find in Buddhism also encourages a gentle, non-violent behaviour towards animals. It is said that a person who throws dish-washing water into a pool where there are small creatures who feed on them, he can acquire immense spiritual merit even by such negligible munificence.

The Buddha asks man to treat animals with kindness and sympathy. The Nandivisala Jātaka explains how kindness should be shown to all domestic animals. It is considered that even wild animals can be tamed by kind words. Therefore, humans as well as other wild creatures can live with each other in nature without fear of anyone only if humans cultivate compassion and sympathy towards other forms of life. The Buddha seriously considered that unless man’s attitude changes, he will not stop harming and killing of innocent lives. Therefore, the Buddha says in the Dhammapada that anyone who intends only his own pleasure and in this process harms other beings, that person would never acquire happiness. That is why in Buddhism we find that acts that are immoral and those that encourage violence to living creatures have been seriously condemned. There is a verse, which says-

Na tena ariyo hoti yena panani hin sati
Ahīṃ sā sabbapananam ariyoti pavuccati
Dhammapada, 270.
Here we see that Buddhism brings forth the message of non-injury, non-violence and compassion towards all forms of life.

Apart from these, we even come across various prescriptions laid down by the Buddha for his disciples. The Buddhist monks are instructed to use only filtered water to avoid harm to tiny living creatures. They were even prohibited from uprooting grass in the summer season as it was expected that tiny creatures might seek shelter in them.

The Buddhist tradition also confronts us with the idea of several compulsory functions mentioned for the monks. The Upavisatha and Pravāranā are certain obligatory ceremonies of the Buddhist Sangha that uphold a sense of deep concern and feeling of welfare for the natural surrounding. Held fortnightly, the Upavisatha ceremony is considered to be a gathering with the intention of propagating dharma. It is well known that the Buddhist monks did not traverse around in the rainy season. So generally, three or four months after the retreat of rainy season, there used to be a gathering known as Pravāranā. Ordinary laymen also could participate in that gathering. It is known that spreading the message of love and welfare towards all beings had been the principal intention in such gatherings. In the same respect, there are Pratimokṣa rules in the Pratimokṣa-sūtra that are also meant for the welfare of the world around. Hence, the different assemblies as well as rules in this tradition seem to work for a better bonding between man and nature (including living as well as the non-living kingdoms). These assemblies signify the fact that welfare of humans is also closely related with the welfare of the entire world where every creature is also a part of this existence. Hence, the feeling of concern and well-being of all should govern our actions.

It is undeniable that in the modern times men have become alienated from nature. Excess of materialistic comfort and enjoyment has undermined the moral and spiritual values in man. Therefore, in this present state of crisis, human race has to look for a radical change in his outlook towards life and the world. We have to reappraise our own value system. It is necessary for us to
understand that if we work with impure minds, it will only result in various discords, enmity, tensions etc in this world. Whereas if we do actions with pure minds, it will definitely leave a positive impact around us.

The Buddha considered mind being the greatest force in the universe. It has the ability to overcome all contaminations and become better to slowly proceed towards the Buddha-state. A sense of moderation in action can come only when we prepare ourselves to be moderate in thought. And for this we do not have to wander in this outer world. It is something that we can do from within. Therefore, the Buddha raised his voice for a psychological training of humanity as he considered that the pollution in environment is in fact the manifestation of psychological pollution within us. If we need to clean our environment, we have to adopt a way of living that springs from a moral and spiritual dimension. As a matter of fact, at this juncture we can look into the ethical precepts of the Buddha. The Buddha had the conviction that moral and disciplined thought as well as action can be beneficial not just for an individual but also for the betterment of society.

(g) The Ethical teachings of the Buddha: Its implications for living and non-living world

It is true that the way mind sows its seeds, it reaps results in that fashion. Buddhism in this respect introduces us with the concept of Pañcaśīla that intends to purify the internal nature of man. The concept of Pañcaśīla suggested for ordinary layman are in fact certain codes which include the following-

(i) ‘Pānātipāta veramaṇī sikkhāpadam samadiyāmi’ meaning I agree to be obligated by the moral injunction to abstain from killing.

(ii) ‘Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadam samadiyāmi’ meaning I agree to be obligated by the moral injunction not to take something that is not given.

(iii) ‘Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadam samadiyāmi’
meaning I agree to be obligated by the moral injunction to abstain from sensual misconduct.

(iv) ‘Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadam samadiyāmi’ meaning I agree to be obligated by the moral injunction to abstain from false speech.

(v) ‘Surāmeraya-majjappamādatthānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadam’ samadiyāmi meaning I agree to be obligated by the moral injunction to abstain from liquor that inebriates.

The Buddha does not admit killing or harming any creature. We have already discussed before how the Buddha condemns this sinful action. Hence, his ethical precepts also include the concept of non-violence for ordinary layman. It can be considered that the idea of non-violence can make room for sympathetic dealing with the non-human world. We can learn to acknowledge the value of other life forms. Moreover, our attitude towards the non-living parts of nature will also improve for the better. We will be able to display prudence in utilizing nature’s wealth as plundering of the reserves of nature also lays bare a sense of aggression or more specifically violence in attitude. Human being is asked to make legitimate use of nature. For this, he has to take only that amount from nature that is essential to his basic needs. Thus, the second precept of the Buddha to man is to remain satisfied with his own possession. It is necessary for one to develop the feeling of contentment. Excess of greed and desire fails to set limit to the enjoyment of the objects of this world. Such a state of exorbitant demands brings adverse effect on the world around. Hence, we find that the second ethical precept asks man to cultivate a moderation in lifestyle. Buddha’s adoption of the middle path or madhyama-mārga is in fact a teaching as to how life can be led giving up the extremes of self-deprivation and self-indulgence. Now, moderation in lifestyle can come only when there is a moderation in sensual enjoyment. Therefore, the third precept of the Buddha recommends mankind to be disciplined in sensual desires. It is true that we often commit things that are wrong due to indisciplined gratification of our senses. Hence, the Buddha seriously condemned sensual
misconduct. It is considered in Buddhism that as our actions can hurt others so can our speech. The Buddha recommends speaking at the appropriate time, speaking what is true and useful, speaking gently with loving kindness. Moderation in speech was considered a great virtue by the Buddha which refrains a man from following vocal activities like ‘falsehood’, ‘slander’, ‘harsh speech’ and ‘frivolous talk.’ Hence, the fourth precept of the Buddha to man is to be disciplined in vocal conduct. The Buddha also had in mind that sometimes men do act in a wrong way being in a state of intoxication. Hence, the fifth precept to ordinary layman is to refrain from drinks and liquor. These are believed to indulge man in several crimes as one loses one’s mental balance in the state of intoxication.

Hence, we can find that the five precepts of the Buddha or the Pañcaśīla are basically a psychological training of mankind aiming at purification of the mind or citta. Unless the internal world is tuned properly, the outer world cannot be changed for the better. A disciplined thought will generate disciplined action. If we want to overcome the crisis in the outer environment, we have to first delve within ourselves only to find qualities we lack for which we fail to build a bonding with others. The qualities like love, compassion etc are the dying needs of this time. Inculcation of these positive emotional attitudes towards every part of nature is highly recommended in the Buddhist concept of Brahmavihāras.

The concept of Brahmavihāras in Buddhist ethics asks man to inculcate the qualities like karuṇā or compassion, maitrī or loving kindness, muditā or cheerfulness in others’ achievement and upokṣā or equanimity. It is believed that cultivation of such qualities brings a significant impact on man. A man with these feelings would never inflict harm on nature. Compassion or karuṇā can foster a sense of bonding with all beings and in turn will make way for responsible attitude towards them. It teaches man to perform activities that would not cause injury or harm to others. As a matter of fact, compassion or karuṇā shows man the way to a harmonious and peaceful co-existence with other creatures on earth. Maitrī or loving kindness destroys our feeling
of hatred that creates discord among beings and nations. If I inculcate a feeling of hatred toward others, I will be hated in turn, and I will suffer. On the contrary, if I inculcate love and compassion, one day or the other I will benefit from it. Muditā eradicates all envious feelings that create tensions among men by engaging them in false competition to supersede others. And above all, upekṣā or a sense of equanimity as proposed in the Brahmavihāras makes man aware of the existence and importance of the other living creatures on this planet.

Hence, we find that the concept of Pañcaśīla as well as Brahmavihāras shows man the path of life which would encourage him to display non-violence, non-hatred, non-greed and a non-destructive attitude towards environment. Following the path shown by the Buddha, we can perhaps control our present ecological problems.

Conclusion

The Buddha through his teachings to mankind unveils the basic truth that man is only a member of this vast undivided universe. His doctrine of Pratityasamutpāda shows a causal origination of everything that exists in this universe. Man is not over and above this principle. Hence, instead of mastery over this planet, man has to learn how to peacefully exist with others as a united community. For this, he needs to shake off his egoist approach towards nature. The Buddha clearly reveals that the real polluting agents lie within man and are not external to him. Human morality and nature are intimately related. Humanity thus has to be reawakened by moral and spiritual discipline. This will help man to undergo a radical change in outlook towards life and the world as a whole. It is the only weapon to mitigate the degradation in our environment. To conclude we can quote the following message of the Buddha:
Sabba pāpassa akaranam kusalassa upasampadā
dSacitta pariyođapanam etam buddhānustasanam

Aganna-Sutta, Dīgha
Nikāya III, 84-93.

The teaching of the Buddha is not to do evil but to inculcate goodness whereby one’s soul is purified.

Notes and References