Chapter - V

Impact of animals, birds on the meditation of Bhikkus in the forest
Chapter V

Impact of animals, birds on the meditation of Bhikkus in the forest

Meditation is the process of learning to work skillfully with the mind in a way that will lead by successive stages to tranquility, insight, spontaneous purification, and total liberation from all negative states. This final stage is accompanied by full and total realization of one’s wholesome or “divine” potential. Along the way one sees through the egocentric trap and springs it. As the process of inner discovery progresses, so the state of one’s inner life improves. Inner harmony, clarity and stability come about; the confused, scattered mind is left behind; and one’s life behind; and one’s life becomes happier, more joyous, open, giving and loving. The culmination is enlightenment- word a little like infinity or eternity: we have rough idea what it means, but cannot actually grasp the full meaning. But it is certainly a state of joy or bliss that passes all understanding.¹

The meaning and purpose of Buddhist Meditation

Meditational practices constitute the very core of the Buddhist approach to life. An intensely practical religion, Buddhism is by contrast inclined to treat doctrinal definitions and historical facts with some degree of unconcern. So meditation is here the very heart beat of the religion or the very life itself.

Enlightenment or the state of Nibbāna, is, of course, the ultimate aim of Buddhist meditation. On the way to Nibbāna they serve to promote spiritual development to diminish the impact of suffering, to calm the mind and to reveal the true facts of existence.

Increased gentleness and sympathy are among their by-products, together with an opening up to life’s message, and a feeling that death has lost its sting. The intended result states quite clearly in the verses by which the monks of old testified their attainment of gnosis (añña). These poems mirror the aims of the monks, together with the occasion of the final insight which may spring from any of the meditations. For in them the monks ‘tell of the goods they have won (attha), without bringing in their own ego (atta)’

There is, first of all, a deep sense of the perishable nature of all that exists and a desire not to become again. ‘Nowhere is there nay permanence in becoming, and there is no eternity about conditioned things. The khandhas rise, and then dissolve again.’

In their ‘Lion’s Roar’ these monks often speak of the freedom from anxiety and fear which they have gained. As Sambula-Kaccana has it, ‘So has my nature been transformed by the Dharma that, dwelling alone in this fearful cave, I have no dread and feel no terror and no consternation’. Or, to give as a final example the works of Khitaka:

‘My heart stands like a rock and swayeth not, 
Void of all lust for things that lust beget, 
And all unshaken in a shifting world.

My heart this trained- whence shall come ill to me’.

This is the goal of Buddhist meditation as described by the Buddhists themselves.³

The Visuddhimagga (iii 105) contains a standard list of 40 ‘subjects of meditation’ (kammathana). They are:

---

2. Conze Edward, Buddhist Meditation p. 11.
3. Ibid p. 12
10 Devices: 1. earth, 2. water, 3. fire, 4. air, 5. blue, 6. yellow, 7. red, 8. white, 9. light, 10. enclosed space:


4 Formless States: 35. Station of endless space, 36. station of unlimited consciousness, 37. Station of nothing whatsoever, 38. Station of neither perception nor non-perception. Perception: 39. of the disgusting aspects of food

Analysis: 40. into four elements.

Two only among the forty are always and under all circumstances beneficial - the development of friendliness and the recollection of death.

‘Meditation is a European term which covers three different things, always clearly distinguished by the Buddhists themselves i.e. mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. Their mutual relation is not at once obvious to Westerners unfamiliar with the tradition and terminology. A diagram may help them:

---

A. Mindfulness concerns the initial stages and more will be said about it later on. B and C are traditionally defined as follows: 'Calming down (samatha) is the Samādhi which is marked by one-pointedness of thought (ekākāgga). Insight (vipassana) is the wisdom which in its own-being is the comprehension of reality as it truly is.

Trance, as it is developed, approaches a condition of rapt attention to an objectless inwardness (anarambana) the more wisdom develops, the clearer the intuition of emptiness (suññata /sūnyatā).

These are the two terminal points at which the world is on the verge of extinction. The combination of the two leads to final emancipation in Nibbāna. I have found that beginners have the greatest difficulties in understanding the fundamental difference between trance and wisdom. They do not see that trance does not have as its function the increase of wisdom. A person who comes out of trance is, not wiser, but entranced. There is even some tension between the two modes of approach and in a given existence most people are forced to specialize in one.⁵

The literary sources

The Canonical Scriptures are replete with references to mediation. The most important single text is the Sutra on the Applications of Mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhānasutta). The bulk of it has been incorporated into this book. It is built up as follows:

I. Mindfulness as to the body: a)Breathing (b) The four postures (c) Mindful comprehension of bodily actions (d) The 32 parts of the body (e) Attention to the 4 elements (f) The body in the cemetery

⁵ Conze Edward, op. cit. p. 17
II. Mindfulness as to feelings

III. Mindfulness as to thoughts

IV. Mindfulness as to dhammas: (a) Five hindrances  (b) Five khandhas  (c) six sense-fields  (d) Seven limbs of enlightenment  (e) Four holy Truths. 6

In the post-canonical literature of the Theravadins, three works stand out as special treatises on meditation. But these are just minor irritants and he has composed one of the great spiritual classics of mankind.

In this community of religious wanderers, the class known as the Samana is given a superior status. They are usually paired with Brähmana in Buddhist and Jaina literature denoting equality of status. The two classes’ as G.S.P.Misra observes ‘actually represented two different trends and theories in the ascetic community viz., Vedic and non Vedic’. The Sramaṇa represented a casteless and classless institution in opposition to the Brähmanical one. Where only dvīja after clearing of his obligations to society in the first three āśramas could become a Parivṛājaka. 7

Foundational beliefs of Sramanism

Ascetic Sramanism posed a negative challenge by being at total variance with Brahmanic values. The Brähmanas living in secular society accepted the fulfillment of social and ritual obligations, emphasized happiness in this world as in the other and hoped to gain it from the Gods. Contrary to this the Śramaṇa, having abandoned secular society, entered a new society based on spiritual relations. They rejected much of the traditional ritual, emphasized inward morality and accepted social obligations, not as something absolute but as something which provided an occasion for the practice of certain voluntary accepted moral vows.

6. Ibid p. 25
Looking up suffering as a concomitant condition of life, they rejected the authority of the Vedas and did not believe in the existence of God as a creator or determiner of destiny. Their opposition to the idea of God arose from their belief in the centrality of the doctrine of Karman. In the śramaṇic tradition the universe is determined by an impersonal natural law. According to it, a being is himself responsible for his own deeds. Salvation, therefore, can be obtained by anybody through self-reliance. The goal of every person was to evolve a way to escape from the cycle of rebirth.

Common endorsement of asceticism in practice and sharing of soteriological goal, brought the Śramaṇas together. The moral vows were accepted as binding with difference of emphasis and interpretation in the different sects. 8

Sākyaputtiya Samaṇas

The Sākyaputtiya Samaṇas were the followers of the Mahā Samaṇa (the great Samaṇa Buddha) one amongst the numerous wandering sects of the age. Many of such sects abounded with leaders professing various doctrines and as it appears from the Jāchandavaggo, were not oft'en unpleasantly quarrelsome and contentious about them. Each of these leading Samaṇas has his own followers who adhered to Dhamma propounded by their leaders. The conventional descriptive compound for such a leader is Sanghi-ganiganacariyo which literally means the instructor (acariyo) of a Sangha or gana. In the Pali Canon, 'Bhikku Sangha' is the name for the Sākyaputtiya Samaṇas who looked upon Buddha as the Sattha (leader) and were bound by common allegiance to his Dhamma.

8. Kane P.V., op.cit, Vol II, Pt II Pg. 942-46
During the years between the initial formation of the Sangha by the Buddha and the advent of Asoka some three hundred years later, the organization of monks (Bhikkhu Sangha) evolved from a free wandering sect of Samāyas to a highly organized settled monastic order living in well established vihāras and governed by rules of Vinaya.  

FROM EREMETICAL TO CENOBITICAL LIFE

The Eremetical stage

Numerous passages of the Buddhist Canonical literature set forth the ideal life for a Bhikkhu- ‘to be free, unsocial and eremetical’. The same ideal is recommended in the four Nissayas-Piniyalopa-bhojanam (mendicancy). Pāmsukulacīvaram (clothing in cast off rags), Rukkhamūlasenāsanam (sitting and lying at the foot of a tree) and Putimuttahesajjam (using urine as medicine). The SāriputtaSutta of the Sutta Nipāta extols the ideal of a Bhikkhu as one who is loth of the world and affects an isolated seat or the root of a tree or a cemetery or who lives in the caves of the mountains’. In several hymns of the Dhammapada and the Theragātha this exaltation of eremetical life is reiterated.

The observance of a lonely peripatetic life by retiring to the forest was an old practice. Buddha adopted this practice and strongly recommended it to his followers as a necessary aid in the attainment of the spiritual goal. On occasions he himself retired to the seclusion of the forest cutting of all contact with others. The vinaya texts inform us, that the members of the sangha having no fixed habitat, took shelter ‘now here, now there- in the woods, at the foot of trees, on hill sides, in grottoes, in mountain caves, cemeteries, in forest, in open plains and in the heaps of straw’.  

10. Ibid
Buddhist Saints of the Theragātha

The Pali Theragātha and Therigātha, which provide a relatively complete definition of the Buddhist saint, this time as arhat. The Theragātha and, books 6 and 7 of the Khuddakanikāya in the Suttapitaka of the Pali canon, contain the songs of some 240 men and women saints who lived during and after the time of the Buddha. Like other of the more ancient texts in the Khuddakanikāya – for example, the Suttanipāta, Dhammapada, Udāna, and Itivuttaka – the Theragātha and show us saints who live primarily in the forest and practice forest renunciation. In contrast to these other texts, however, in the Theragātha and these forest saints provide the primary focus of discussion.¹¹

Winternitz examined these songs and noticed that their contents are at variance with much of the rest of the Pali canon, particularly in their concern for mythological themes and supernatural beings. Possibly with a version of the two-tiered model of Buddhism in mind, he concluded that the songs reflect a degradation of normative monasticism and must therefore be relatively late, dating at least after the time of Aśoka. Norman, however, points out that concerns for mythology and supernatural beings existed in earliest Buddhist times. He also tells us that in these songs there is mention of ordination at the age of seven, something generally forbidden in the vinaya, suggesting that at least some of the material in the texts dates from a time prior to the classical formation of the vinaya rules. Norman’s doctrinal, metrical, and linguistic analyses confirm this judgment and lead him to conclude that the contents of both texts were composed over an extended period, from the end of the sixth century B.C.E to the middle of the third century B.C.E. This dating, from the lifetime of the Buddha to the reign of King Aśoka, would place the Theragātha and among the earliest Buddhist texts, with portions of them representing a particularly ancient stratum of Buddhist literature.¹²

---

¹¹ Ray Reginald A, Buddhist Saints in India p. 79
¹² Ibid
DWELLING IN THE FOREST

The wandering renunciant takes up residence in the forest, that is, in remote and uninhabited regions, for “forests (araṇīka) are delightful, where (ordinary) people find no delight. (Only) those rid of desire will delight there”. The specific places where the forest renunciants dwell include mountains (giri), the mountain peeks (nagamuddha) mountain crests (kuta), mountain clefts (nagavivara), caves (lena), woods (vana), hillsides (sanu), the bases of trees (rakkhamūla; Skt., vṛksamūla), and so on. Sometimes, the renunciant takes up residence in the cremation grounds. Occasionally, he or she lives in a small hut (kuṭi or kuṭika), and the frequent association of such huts with rain and storm suggests that it was during the rainy season that these were typically used. An indication of the variety of places in which a renunciant might live and mediate during his or her career is given in several of the songs, such as Samkicca’s in which he remarks, “I have dwelt in woods, caves, and grottoes, in solitary lodgings, in a place frequented by beasts of prey” 13

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOLITUDE. One of the most frequently repeated themes in the Theragātha and is that of the necessity, the virtue, and the joy of a life lived away from others, in seclusion. One is to avoid all companions, “not living ... with householders nor houseless ones alike”. Thus the saints live alone (ekāsana), dwell secluded (pavivitta), find no satisfaction (asamsattha) in company, and enjoy the “sweetness of solitude”. Dwelling “alone in the forest like a tree rejected in a wood”, the renunciant is not to grieve, for “if no-one else is found in front or behind, it is very pleasant for one dwelling alone in the wood, ... alone, companionless, in the pleasant great wood”. The solitary retreat of renunciants makes them inaccessible to others, the virtue of which is often stressed. It is not only that renunciants are to live in retreat alone; in addition, they wander alone.

13. Ray Reginald A, Buddhist Saints in India p. 83
As in the cases of the other elements of the forest renunciants' lives, their solitude exists in order to facilitate medication, for bhikkhus and bhikkhunis withdraw into solitude for the purpose of medication and therefore "should resort to a lodging which is secluded". Significantly, like the other elements of the forest life, such solitude supports medication not only physically and socially but psychologically and spiritually.

Theragātha and present the belief that, by retiring to solitary retreat, the forest renunciant may purify defilements in a depth and manner not possible "in company."

The intensive practice of meditation, which makes up the substance of the spiritual quest. Meditation (jhāna [Skt., dhyāna], sati [Skt., smrti]), not surprisingly, stands at the center of the Theragātha and; one abandons the world, follows the arduous conventions of forest life, and dwells in solitude all for the purpose of meditation. And one meditates because it is the sole road to enlightenment. It is uniquely through meditation that one trains one's mind, develops good qualities, cultivates genuine compassion for others, gains the highest happiness, and achieves liberation. Thus, in one's solitary retreat, "one should meditate undistracted" "continually putting forth energy". The sounds of the forest are welcome because they "awaken the sleeper to meditation". One should sit down, cross one's legs, and hold one's body erect. Then one carries out the practice of meditation to transform the mind's unruliness and gradually bring it into a state of calm. Mindfulness (sati) is the standard practice of the two texts. Sometimes other standard practices are mentioned, such as the practice of concentration (jhāna), "recollecting the enlightened one", and practicing the four unlimited (appamāṇa, Skt., apramāṇa). There are also references to the classical cremation ground (cemetery) contemplations.

14. Ray Reginald A, op.cit.p..84
15. Ibid. p. 87
Meditation is depicted as an arduous practice, requiring commitment and exertion, because the mind is wild and chaotic. Dominated by conflicting and defiling emotions, it is a horse that needs to be tamed and a wild elephant that needs to be put in a pen. Given this situation, one must exert oneself in order to attain success. Part of the rigor of meditation is the lifelong commitment it entails, seen in Anuruddha’s reference to fifty-five years of meditation practice. The rigor of meditation is also a day-to-day commitment, as implied by one of the classical dhutaguna practices wherein the renunciant does not lie down at any time but remains upright, meditating night and day (nesajjika; Skt., naisadika). In addition to expression the rigors of the solitary meditative path, the songs also speak of the joy and contentment that it brings.

Bhuta remarks, “When in the sky the thunder-cloud rumbles, full of torrents of rain all around on the path of the birds, and the bhikkhu who has gone into the cave meditates, he does not find greater contentment than this” , Meditation is not something abandoned at the time of realization but plays a role for the enlightened one in two ways. First, although enlightened, one continues to meditate, like Bhaddiya, who “having plucked out craving root and all, meditates, happy indeed” . Second, meditation, it would seem, becomes internalized and defines the state of being of the saint.16

The Buddha then asks what advantages Kasyapa finds in this way of life, and the saint replies that there are two; his own happiness and his compassion for those who will come after. “For surely these may fall into error. But let them say: They who were disciples of the Buddha and of the followers of the Buddha were for many a day forest dwellers and commended forest life . . . . This for many a day will be for their good and for their happiness” . As we shall presently see, the error into which future generations may fall is the abandonment of the life of forest renunciation, an error to be remedied only by a reaffirmation of the priority of forest values and practices.

16. Ray Reginald A, op.cit.p..87
The passage concludes with the Buddha confirming the Kasyapa has indeed practiced “for the happiness of many folk, out of compassion for the world, for the salvation, the good, the happiness of devas and men.” “Wherefore, Kassapa, “ the Buddha says, “wear thou thy coarse rag-robes that are past wearing, go thy rounds for alms and dwell in the forest” . From the viewpoint of this passage, then, normative Buddhism is to be found in the life of forest renunciation. 17

**Nature in the Theragātha**

*(Essays on Buddhism and Pali literature, Proff. Angraj Chaudhary)*

Lord Buddha who, seeing sufferings and miseries in the world which is in constant flux and where there is nothing permanent, made Arhatship as his ideal and betrayed as predilection for solitude, ‘ and that not within walls, but away in the forest.’ ‘Formerly I did not live at ease being troubled by those litigious, contentious, quarrelsome, disputatious Bhikkhus of Kosambi, the constant raisers of questions before the Samgha. But now being alone and without a companion I live pleasantly and at ease remote from those litigious, contentious, quarrelsome disputatious Bhikkhus of Kosambi, the constant raisers of questions before the Samgha’. And ‘ thus the noble one and the noble, the elephant tusked with tusks like cart poles (and the noble one among men) the mind of the one and the mind of the other harmonise in this, that they take delight in dwelling alone in the forest’. *Suttanta* also bears out that the members of the order were advised to cultivate the art of solitude. ‘If a Bhikkhu should desire, Brethren, by the complete destructions of the three Bonds to become converted, to be longer liable to be reborn in a state of suffering, and to be assured of final salvation, let him then fulfill all righteousness, let him be devoted to that quietude of heart which springs from within, let him not drive back the ecstasy of contemplation, let him look through things, let him be much alone.’

17. Ibid. p. 113
The founder of Monastic Order had tasted the advantages of solitude and on more than one occasion explained them to the Bhikkus and warned them. ‘Now have I made this clear to you. Here, Bhikkus, are the roots of trees, here are empty places. Meditate, be earnest lest hereafter ye regret.’

It is therefore, quite natural that the members of the Order too, should betray the same predilection. In the Theragātha which is a collection of the psalms of the Brethren as the is of the sisters, a number of Theras have sung praises of solitude.

Delightful are the forests, where no crowd

Doth come to take its pleasure; there will they

Who are released from passions find there joy.

Not seekers they for sense-satiety.

They realized that may were the distracting elements in the mundane life and they would not let them concentrate their mind and meditate and achieve the tranquility of mind and serenity of soul.

Therefore what was utterly needed was to go far away from the madding crowd, because it was only solitude which would provide the most congenial atmosphere for practicing meditation. Tissa-Kumara, the youngest brother of the king Dhammāsoka was fed up with the court life. He disliked the sycophants, courtiers and the soldiers and longed to be rid of them.

One he say Greek Thera, Maha Dhamma Rakkhita seated under a tree and was so impressed that his longing to live in the forest multiplied several times.¹⁹

---

19. Ibid p. 139
The Theragātha is a collection of such utterances and, therefore, it is a supreme record of the feelings, emotions, the thrilling sensations of joy which they derived from solitude and from the hundred thousand objects of Nature, while they practiced meditation.

Primarily, the Theragātha is a monumental work in the whole of Pali literature as it is a record of the psalms of the Brethren who had broken the ten fetters, who had become thoroughly purged from every kind of taint, who enjoyed the tranquility of mind and finally, who had realized Nibbāna, the ultimate goal and the summum bonum of life according to Buddhist Ethics. But it is not only this. It is a tour de force from yet another point of view which is literary and aesthetic. The spiritual songs which are undoubtedly superb also record the theras’ love of and admiration for Nature. They have, not perhaps incidentally described the sights and sound of Nature very feelingly and so Winernitz is perfectly right in saying that the gathas are the real gems of Indian lyric poetry. Some of the theras are evidently gifted with poetic talent and among the motives urging them to seek solitude, a poetic gift may very well have counted. And that is why even if they renounced the world, they could not afford to be aesthetically insensitive and unresponsive towards Nature. They sat in the lap of Nature, drank deep its beauty and experienced the myriad sensations coming from different objects of Nature.²⁰

These theras poets did not solely cultivate the art of self-expression. It will be far from truth to say that they practiced art for art’s sake. On the other hand, they made it subservient to the great theme of their life- the realization of Nibbana. No doubt, they had the capacity to appreciate the beauties of Nature but they never forgot

---
²⁰ Ibid p. 139
that happiness which was yielded by ‘ beholding the Norm’ far excelled any derived from natural scenery.

Not music’s fivefold wedded sound can yield
Such charm as comes over him who with a heart
Intent and calm rightly beholds the Norm.

But yet the Theragātha remains a unique literary work in the entire extant Pali literature.

Although the love of nature and, therefore, the description thereof is scattered in Pali literature, the Theragātha is the only book wherein we get it in abundance. Among the Jātakas, the Vessantara Jātaka is important for the realistic descriptions of Nature. Here the flora and fauna of Himvanta region have been described at length.21

When you shall hear the rivers roar, the fairy creatures sing
Believe me, you will clean forget that ever you were king.
Rhinocerous and buffalo, that make the woodland ring
Lion and Tiger- You’ll forget that ever you were king.
When on the mountain top you see the peacock dance and spring
Before the pea-hens, you’ll forget that ever you were king
When in the winter you behold the trees all flowering.
Waft their sweet odours, you’ll forget that ever you were king.
When in the winter you behold the plants all flowering
The bimbajala, kutaja and lotus scattering
Abroad their obours, you’ll………..

The description of Nature here is realistic and it is not this kind of treatment of Nature which the Theragātha is important for. As a matter of fact, it stands supreme from all in that kind of description of Nature which Ruskin calls the Pathetic fallacy. The poet theraś credit Nature with their emotions. When the peacocks call, it seems to Cittaka that they wake him from his noonday sleep to set himself to though profound and religious.

21. Prof. Chaudhary Angraj, op.cit.p. 139
Peacocks of sapphire neck and comely crest
Calling, calling in Karamviya woods;
By cool and humid winds made musical;
They wake the thinker from his noonday sleep.

Such descriptions and the like are characteristics of the Theragātha and this excellent merit of the book earns for it a place supremely important in all the literature of the world, more so in pali literature where there is much of philosophy and ethics. Even if the Theragātha be regarded as a collection of the spiritual songs, it will, nevertheless, ever remain a unique literary feat wherein the theras have recorded their aesthetic feelings and vibrations of the fine chords of their heart. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the Theragātha, the, and perhaps a few other books, are the only oases in the vast dry land of Pali literature. And this quality of the theras that they had a love of Nature and they expressed it adds to rather than detracts from the spiritual and literary merits of Pali literature.22

But there is no denying that the theras were deeply associated with Nature. They reveal a remarkable love for hills and caves, for rivers and groves and for forests. And naturally, therefore, ‘they delight in lingering over the descriptions of the forest and mountain scenery in the midst of which the solitary sage pursues his meditation.’ In course of their practicing meditation either in a well-roofed hut or in a hut without a roof over it they directly experienced the change of season. Moreover, the magnificent landscapes formed by the change of colour in the sky filled their hearts with immense pleasure. And they garbed their reactions to these myriad forms of Nature in words. There are several description of this kind in the Theragātha.

22. Prof. Chaudhary Angraj, op.cit.p.. 140
The rainy season provides the most congenial atmosphere for practicing meditation. The graceful sailing of the clouds in the sky, the rolling of the thunder, the falling rains, the calling of the peacocks etc. help create a suitable atmosphere for meditation.

These theras had taken orders and their supreme object in life was to behold the Norm and realize Nibbāna. And so the rainy season which served the purpose of stimulating the erotic passions of the lover and the beloved and increased their pangs of separation, inspired the Theras to practice contemplation.23

Hark! how the peacocks make the welkin ring,
Fair-crested, fine their plumes and azure throat,
Graceful in shape and pleasant in their cry.
And see how the broad landscape watered well
Lies verdure-clad beneath the dappled sky!
Where dying cometh not, ineffable.

The peacocks call. The vast earth is verdure-clad. The sky is filled with the rain-laden black clouds. There is mirth and gaiety in Nature, there is unflagging zeal everywhere. So the Bhikkhus, too, are fully wake in their mind. This inspires them to realize the subtly deep and the ineffable Nibbāna. The theras were not like the Yaksa and they had an altogether different predilection. It is this predilection which gives spiritual tinge to the descriptions of Nature in the Theragātha. This quality of the gathas is unique and such charming and sublime descriptions of Nature are very rare. Besides, the alliteration here makes this lyric a real artistic achievement.24

23. Ibid. p. 144
24. Prof. Chaudhary Angraj, op.citp. 144
The theras had established a relationship with Nature which is almost Wordsworthian. Suppaka declares his love of retirement by praise of his dwelling place. He says:-

‘whenever I see the crane, her clear bright wings
Outstretched in fear to flee the black stormcloud,
A shelter seeking, to safe shelter borne
Then doth the river Ajakarni
Give joy to me.....
She brings us luck. Here as it good to be’.

On the one hand the above mentioned gāthās astonishingly reveal the theras’ capacity to observe Nature and describe her as she is and on the other hand they express a profound love of Nature. ‘Not from the mountain-streams is it time to-day to flit. Is an expression of that deep and profound love of Nature which is rare. In addition to these, they also show how the beauty of the rains inspires the theras for the great task they have set themselves to this and a few subsequent gāthās s are really the marvelous achievement of the theras. Each Gāha presents before us a landscape and the descriptions of the sights and sounds of Nature are done in a few chosen words. How great is the economy, and how captivating the result ! Just a few strokes of pen and a landscape floats before our mind.25

‘The pathways of the birds are thick with rain’ is an altogether novel method of expressing that it is raining in torrents. And when it rains so heavily, the Bhikkhu hears the thunder and is rapt is an ecstasy of thought. It will not be too much to say that ‘they present a unique blend of religious maturity, primeval shyness and aesthetic sensitiveness.’ Eka Vihāri expresses his ardent love of solitude and his longing to go to a region remarkable for scenic beauties is expressed in these gathas.

25. Ibid.p. 145
Yea, swiftly and alone, bound to my quest,
I’ll to the jungle that I love the haunt
O wanton elephants, the source and means
Of thrilling zest to each ascetic soul,
In cool Wood’s flowery glades cool waters lie,
Within the hollows of the hills; and there
I’ll bathe my limbs when hot and tired and there
At large in ample solitude I’ll roam.

‘Cool woods’, ‘flowery glades and ‘cool waters’ are the tactual and visual images which are sensuous enough to be But lest the meditator should indulge in them he immediately thinks of the ample solitude where he meditates. Nor are the auditory images absent from the gāthās. The theras not only hear the roaring of the clouds but they hear the melodious cries of peacocks and the trumpeting of the elephants. ‘Of forest freshened by new rain’ is a supreme example of visual image.26

On reading the Theragātha one is immediately struck with two things. The first is the abundant descriptions of he rains and the sights and sounds of this season. The second is paucity of the descriptions of other seasons, particularly of the spring which has been magnificently and splendidly described in other Sanskrit works of art. And naturally, therefore, the question arises what made the theras love the rainy season so much and why there is a plethora of beautiful landscapes related to this season? The key to this question lies, I think, in the Vinaya rules. It was inevitable on the part of the theras to spend the rainy season, which lasted for three months either from the first of Asadha to the end of Bhadrapāda or from the beginning villages or towns. In the rest of the year they were busy in their duty towards other. During the rainy season when they observed Vassavasa Retreat, they withdrew themselves from the world and engaged themselves from the world and engaged themselves in meditative practices.

26. Prof. Chaudhary Angraj, op.cit.p. 146
They had leisure enough to observe the beautiful landscapes which inspired them for winning Arhatship and realizing Nibbāna. These landscapes were tinged with sublime beauty. They were rain-washed and pure and had almost the virginal luster. We shall do well to notice here one thing and it is this that the descriptions of the rains in the Theragātha are typically the descriptions of the rains in North India after the monsoon breaks out in the beginning or in the middle of June.\(^{27}\)

‘When in the lowering sky thunders the storm clouds’ drum
“And all the pathways of the birds are thick with rain.’
Or ‘When at dead of night in lonely wood god rains’
Or “in fair open glade, or in the depths of forest,
freshened by new rain.”
Or’ Hark, how the peacocks make the welkin ring,
Fair crested, fine their plumes and azure throat.’
Or’ And see how this broad landscape watered well
Lies verdure-clad beneath the dappled sky’
Or “whenever I see the crane, her clear bright wings________
Outstretched in fear to flee the black storm-cloud”

These and many others are the landscapes which prove beyond that the rains which have been described in the gāthās are the rains after the monsoon breaks out. They further prove that these are the elaborate descriptions of the sky and the vegetational region in June, July and August in which the theras observed Vassāvāsa Retreat.

‘Depths of forest’ clearly indicates that the trees on the forest have put forth new leaves and that is why the forest is dense. ‘Freshened by new rain’ proves it almost conclusively that it is the description of the rains. ‘The landscape is verdant’ leaves no room for any doubt.

\(^{27}\) Ibid p. 148
That it is a description of North India can be proved topographically. The rivers-Ajakarni, Neranjara etc. and the hills Vehbara, Pandava, Vulture’s peak and the mountain Himalaya are in North India.

Among the fauna described here are the peacock, swan, crane, elephants, frogs, deer etc. Any ornithologist can say that they are seen in plenty only in the rainy season. The peacock is very much associated with it and so are swans and cranes.28

According to Bhuta Thera there is no higher blessing than that which one experiences when rapt in ecstasy of thought. Nature has been described by him as gorgeous and beautiful, yet it does not afford him that much of pleasure as is afforded by meditation, when a Bhikkhu is rapt in an ecstasy of thought.

When in the lowering sky thunders the storm clouds drum.
And all the pathways of the birds are thick with rain.
The brother sisters within the hollow of the hills
Rapt in an ecstasy of thought:- no higher bliss
Is given to man than this.

Theragāthā – Verses mentions the role played by the Animals to enhance meditation.

The following gāthas of the theras mentioned in Theragātha explains how the Nature and various Animals were responsible to create favorable atmosphere for meditation and the Bhikkus were inspired to spend more and more time in practicing meditation heartily.

28. Prof. Chaudhary Angraj, op.cit.p.149
Culaka Thera –

211    Nadanti mōrā susikhā supekhupā
    Sunīlagīvā sumukhā sugajīno,
    Susaddalā cāpi mahāmahī ayām
    Subyāpitambūl suvalāhakaṁ nabhaṁ.

The Fair-crested peacocks cry out, fair-winged with beautiful blue neck, fair-faced and with beautiful blue neck, fair-faced and with beautiful song and fine cry; this great earth is well-grassed and well-watered; the sky has good clouds.

212. Sukallarūpo sumanassa jhāya
    Sunikkhamo sādu subuddhasāsane,
    Susukkasukkaṁ nipaṇaṁ sududdasāṁ
    Phusāmi taṁ uttamamaccutaṁ padanti.

There is the beautiful aspect of a happy man; meditate upon it; a good man finds it easy to go forth in the teaching of the well-enlightened one. Attain that uttermost unchanging state, most pure, subtle very hard to see.

Bhuta Thera

522. Yadā nabhe gajjati meghadundubhi
    Dhūrākulā vihagapathe3 samantato,
    Bhikkhū ca pabhāragato'va jhāyati
    Tato ratiṁ paramataram na vindati.

When in the sky the thunder-cloud rumbles, full of torrents of rain all around on the path of the birds, and the bhikkhu who has gone into the cave meditates, he does not find greater contentment than this.

524. Yadā nīśthe rahikamhi kānane
    Deve galantamhi nadanti dāthino,
    Bhikkhū ca pabhāragato'va jhāyati
    Tato ratiṁ paramataram na vindati.
When at night in a lonely grove, while the sky (deva) vains, the tanged animals roar, and the bhikkhu who has gone into the cave meditates, he does not find greater contentment than this.  

Cittaka therā

22. Nīlā sugāvā sikhino morā
kāraṇciyam abhinadanti.  
Te sītavātakadditakalitā  
suttam jhāyam nibodhena'ti.

Blue, with beautiful necks, the crested peacocks call in karamvi; urged on by the cool breeze they awaken the sleeper to meditation.

Vanavaccha therā

113 Acchodikā pathusilā  
gonaṅgulamigāyutā,  
Ambusevālasaṅjannā  
te selā ramayanti ma'nti.

With clear water and wide crags, haunted by monkeys and deer, covered with oozing moss, those rocks delight me.

Gahvaratiriya therā

31. Phutṭho damsehi makasehi  
araṇnasmiṃ brahāvane  
Nāgo saṅgāmāsiṣevā  
sato tatrādhivāṣaye’ti.

Tormented by ghats and mosquitos in the forest, in the great wood, like an elephant in the van of the battle, one should endure there mindful.

Mahakassapa therā

1062 Karerimālāvitaṭā  
bhūmiḥbhāgā manoramā,  
 Kuṇjarābhirudā rammā  
te selā ramayanti maṭṭa.
Spread with garlands of kareri vines, the regions of the earth are delightful. Resounding with elephants, those rocky crags refresh me.

1063 Nilabhavaṃṇā rucirā
vārisītā suvindharā,
Indagopakasaṅchannā
te selā ramayanti maṃ

Those rocks refresh me, the color of blue-dark clouds, beautiful, cooled with the waters of clear-flowing streams covered with Indagopaka insects.

Like the ridge of a blue cloud, like an excellent gabled house, resounding with elephants those lovely rocks delight me.

1064 Nilabhakātasadīśā
kūṭāgāravarūpamā
Vāraṇābhirudā ramā
te selā ramayanti maṃ.

The lovely surfaces are rained upon; the mountains are resorted to by seers. Made to resound by peacocks those rocks delight me.

1065 Abhivuṭṭhā rammataḷā
nagā isihi sevitā,
Abbhunnaditā sikhīhi te
selā ramayanti maṃ.

1066 Alamḥ jhāyitukāmmassa
pahitattassa me sato,
Alamḥ me atthakāmmassa
pahitattassa bhikkhuno

– It is enough for me, desiring to meditate, resolute, mindful. It is enough for me a resolute bhikkhus desirous of the goal.

1067 Alamḥ me phāsukāmassa
pahitattassa bhikkhuno,
Alamḥ me yogakāmassa
pahitattassa ādino.
It is enough for me, a resolute bhikkhu desireous of comfort. It is enough for me, a resolute venerable one desireous of application of mind.\(^{41}\)

1068 *Ummāpupphena l samāṇā gaganāvabhachāditā, Nānādijagaṇākīṇṇā te sāla ramayanti mām*

Being covered with flax flowers a the sky is covered with clouds full of flocks of various Birds, those rocks delight me.\(^{42}\)

1069 *Anākīṇṇā gahaṭṭhehi migasaṅghaniseviṁ, Nānādijagaṇākīṇṇā te sāla ramayanti maṁ.*

Not filled with householders, but resorted to by herds of deer, full of flocks of various birds, those rocks delight me.\(^{43}\)

1070. *Acchodikā puthusilā genaṅgulamīgyutā, Ambusevālasaṅchanna te sāla ramayanti maṁ.*

With clear water and wide crags, haunted by monkeys and deer, covered with oozing moss, those rocks delight me.\(^{44}\)

**Talputta thera**

1103. *Kadā mayūrassa sikhandaṁ vane Dijassa sutvā girigabhare rutam Paccuṭṭhahitvā amatassa pattiyā Samcintiye tam nu kadā bhavissati.*

When, hearing in the mountain cavern the cry of the peacock, the crested bird, in the wood, shall I rising up give thought to the attainment of the undying? when indeed will it be?\(^{45}\)

1108. *Nanu ahaṁ citta tayāṁhi yācito Giribbaje citrabhadā vihaṅgamā Mahindaghosatthantābhigajjino Te tam raṁissanti vanamhi jhāyinaṁ*
Was I not, begged by you, mind,” On Giribaja's peaks those birds with vagieged wings, greating the thunder which is the sound of Mahinda, will delight you as you meditate in the wood.”  

1113. *Māyūraṁkoṇcābhīrutamhi kānane*
*Dīpihi vyagghehi purakkhato vasaṁ*
*Kāye apeekkham jaha mā virādhaya*
*Iūssu maṁ citta pure niyuṇjasī.*

“Dwelling in the grove which resounds with the cries of peacocks and herons, revered by leopards and tigers, give up longing for the body; do not fail” ; so you used to urge me, mind.  

1114. *Bhāvehi jhānāni ca inidriyāni*
*Balāni bojjhāgasamādhibhāvanā*
*Tisso ca vijjā phusa buddhasāsane*
*Iūssu maṁ citta pure niyuṇjasī.*

“Develop the meditations, and faculties, and powers, the constituents of enlightenment, and the developments of concentrations, attain the three knowledge’s in the Buddhas teaching”; so you used to urge me, mind.  

1115. *Bhāvehi maggam amatassa pattiya*
*Niyāṇikāṁ sabbadukkhakkhayogadhami*
*Aṭṭhaṅgikāṁ sabbakilesasadoshanāṁ*
*Iūssu maṁ citta pure niyuṇjasī.*

“Develop the way for the attainment of the undying, leading to salvation, plunging into the annihilation of all pain, eight-fold, purifying all defilements”; so you used to urge me, mind.  

1135. *Varūhaṇeyya vigālhavevite*
*Pabhārakūṭe pakateva sundare,*
*Navambunā pāvusasittākānane*
*Tahim guhāgehagato rammisas.*

In a cave and as a mountain crest, frequented and plunged into by wild boars and antelopes, or as a naturally pleasant space, or in a grove sprinkled
with fresh water by rain, having gone to your cave-house you will rejoice there.  

1136 Sunīlagīvā susikhā supekkhuṇā  
Suciṭṭapattacakchanā vihaṅgamā,  
Suvaṅghosatthantābhīgajījino  
Te taṁ ramissantiō vanamhi jhāyinam.  

Birds with beautiful blue neck, with beautiful crest, with beautiful tail feathers with beautiful wings of variegated feathers, greeting the beautiful – sounding thunder will delight you as you meditate in the wood.  

1144. Migo yathā seri sucittakānane  
Rammaṁ giriṁ pāvusaabbhamāliniṁ,  
Anākule tattha nage ramissam  
Asaṁsayam citta parābhavissasi.  

like the deer roaming at will in the variegated grove, having entered the delightful mountain, wreathed in clouds, I shall rejoice there on the uncrowded mountain, you, mind will certainly perish.  

All these are beautiful examples of sublime poetry. The beautiful objects of nature and the charming scenes of nature do not prove to be distracting but these, on the other hand. Create a congenial atmosphere for the monks to sit in meditation for long.  

All these go to prove that Nature with Animals has been described in the Theragātha in a sublime manner with her beauty and awe and this induced the theras to engage themselves in meditation in order to enjoy the dhyāna-sukhs and ultimately realize the Great Fruit i.e. Nibbāna.  

29 to 52. Norman K.R., translated, The Elders Verses 1, Theragātha.PTS