

***PRAṬĪTYASAMUTPĀDA* IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY : AN ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

Environmental awareness, co-operation and nonviolence is the common message of Buddhism-

*“sukho Buddhānaṃ uppādo sukho Dhammassadesanā |
Sukhā saṃgassa sāmaggī samaggānaṃ tapo sukho||”*

- (*Dhammapada*, 14.8)

Peace and the survival of life on earth as we know are become threatened by human activities which lack a commitment to human values. Destruction of the nature and natural resources results from ignorance, greed and lack of respect for the earth’s living and non-living things. To control these digastric results of the nature we need to look forward our ancient thoughts and values.

‘Pratītyasamutpāda’ or dependent origination is a key principle and the central point of the Buddhist philosophical thought. According to this fundamental principle everything arises and causes in dependence upon causes and conditions. Environmental degradation is the result of human activities. How to balance between needs and greed? It is a big question in the present time. Buddhist philosophy says that desire of attachment ‘self’ is the root cause of suffering or *‘Dukkha’*. Ignorance (*avijja*) of understanding ‘self’ and attachment towards materialistic world is the root cause of climate change and global warming. The whole problem of climate change is due to our individualist “desire of more”. Dependent

origination can be understood in many aspects, like co-existence, interdependence, sustainable growth and so on.

Therefore in the Buddhist context the insight and profound knowledge of *pratītyasamutpāda* is paramount important especially to overcome man's basic problem of suffering in the world existence. Thus the every single problem related to the environment is connected with a particular cause. It means if we can identify and take the action in right direction we can definitely protect the environment.

Introduction :

Today environment is a major contemporary issue in front of the world. Environment includes all living and non-living objects. We live in the environment and use the environmental resources, like air, water and land for our needs. Development means also meeting the needs of people. While meeting the ever-growing needs, we put pressure on the environment. When the pressure exceeds the carrying capacity of the environment to repair or replace itself, it creates a serious problem of environmental degradation. If we use any environmental resource such as ground water beyond its limit of replacement, we may lose it forever. Therefore there is a need to create awareness about environmental protection. While efforts are being made at the national and international level to protect our environment, it is also the responsibility of every citizen to use our environmental resources with care and protect them from degradation.

Environment constitutes a very important role in our life. To understand life without studying the impact of environment is simply impossible. The need to protect environment can be ignored only at our peril. We use environmental resources in our day to day life. In these resources some are renewable and some non-renewable, like coal and petroleum, which are prone to depletion. All human activities have an impact on environment. But in the last two centuries or so, the human influence on

environment has increased manifold due to the rapid population. The environmental degradation poses a great danger to man's own survival. It should be realized, sooner than later, that conservation and improvement of the environment are vital for the survival and well-being of mankind. Natural resources of land, air and water have to be used wisely as a trust to ensure a healthy environment for the present and future generation.

● **Causes and Effects of Environmental Degradation :**

Some of the notable causes and effects of the environmental degradation can be identified as under-

- A) Population growth :** population growth means more people to eat and breath and putting an excessive pressure on land and forest and ultimately disturbing the ecological balance. Our growing population is putting pressure land, leading to poor quality productivity, deforestation. The loss of forest land so necessary for ecological balance and extinction of wild life leading to imbalance in the ecological order, loss of wild life heritage and ultimately dwindling of several species. The growing population is not only a problem for the natural environment; it is a problem for any other aspect of environment, like social, economic, political etc.
- B) Urbanization :** urbanization is no less a source of pollution, and therefore a threat to the environment. Urbanization means plaintive race of people from village to the cities. The net result of urbanization is dirt, diseases and disasters. In a state of growing urbanization, environmental problem like sanitation, ill-health, housing, water supply and electricity keep expanding. On the other hand, the environmental degradation is caused in the rural life due to indiscriminate collection of firewood, overgrazing and depletion of other natural resources.

- C) Industrialization** : industrialization coupled with the development of the means of transport and communication has not only polluted the environment, but also has led to the shrinking of the natural resources. Both ways the loss is really heavy. Increasing level of heat fluxes, carbon dioxide and particulate radioactive nuclear wastes and the like create environment hazards. On the other hand the consumption of conventional source of energy leads to the loss of natural resource. Thus we are building a world without caring for future generations.
- D) Land, air and water** : pollution of land and water has affected plants, animals and human beings. The quality of soil is deteriorating resulting in the loss of agricultural land. The loss is estimated to be about five to seven million hectares of land each year. Soil erosion, as a result of wind and water coasts the world dearly. The recurring floods have their own peculiar casualties like deforestation, silt in the river bed, inadequate and improper drainage, loss of men and property. The vast oceans, after being turned in to dumping grounds for all nuclear wastes, have poisoned and polluted the whole natural environment¹.

● **Awareness about environmental protection :**

From the past three decades, environment has attracted the attention of decision makers, scientists and even laymen in many parts of the world. They are becoming increasingly conscious of issues such as famines, droughts, floods scarcity of fuel, firewood and fodder, pollution of air and water, problems of hazardous chemicals and radiation, depletion of natural resources, extinction of wildlife and dangers to flora and fauna. People are now aware of the need to protect the natural environmental resources of air, water, soil and plant life that constitute the natural capital on which man depends.

The environmental issues are important because the absence of solutions is more horrible. Unless environmental issues are not solved or not taken care of the coming generations may find earth worth not living. The need of the planet and the needs of the person have become one.

There is no denying the fact that environment has to be protected and conserved so to make future life possible. Indeed man's needs are increasing and accordingly the environment is also being altered, indeed, nature's capacity is too accommodating and too regenerative yet there is a limit to nature's capacity, especially when pressure of exploding population and technology keep mounting.

● **Sustainable development :**

Before describing the dependent origination it's we should know about sustainable development theory of environmental science. The world commission on environment and development submitted its report entitled "our common future" in 1987. This report highlighted and popularized the concept of 'sustainable development'. Sustainable development has been defined on meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations². All development activities involve some amount of environmental degradation. What is required is to take into account the damage to environment as a result of development, and strike a balance between development and environmental protection. The aim should be to achieve sustainable levels of people's welfare and development. The primary concern is how many people can ultimately be supported by environment and at what level of quality of life.

The concept of sustainable development is more about environment and less about development; more about stability and less about change; more about restricting one's wants and less about the continuing material development more about the non-

exploitative attitude towards environment and less about harnessing it; more about small communities and less about the larger ones. It is not a concept of development with environment, but is environment without growth³.

Undoubtedly ecological degradation should stop. But why should the pace of development stop? A disciplined uses of environmental benefits go to long way for all round development. Scholars and activists assert that environmental degradation can be controlled and reversed only by ensuring that the parties causing the damage should be made accountable for their action and that they should participate in improving environmental conditions. What is needed is a set of norms, which bring the demands of development and the compulsion of environment closer to each-other.

There are two world views predominantly occupies central place in ecology. They are holistic and human centric world views. At present the environmental pollution is became a universal problem. If everybody wants to get rid of environmental pollution than must have a holistic world view. Because of this holistic view the whole world is observed like a circle. In this holistic worldview, there is no dominating view point rather it is a view of co-operation. The human centric view is the cause of many problems. Fights among different countries, states, castes are the result of this anthropocentric or human centered world view.

The observation of classical science regarding the world is also dualistic and anthropocentric. The classical scientists always described the world like a machine and divided it into mind and matter two separate parts. But the modern science believes in holistic or ecological view. They spread out the biological thought. In modern science this change called paradigm shift. Systematic thinking is started by the modern science. The base of modern science is natural science. The influence of modern physics goes

beyond technology. The ecological thought in modern science comes from eastern mystic.

In such a relationship between nature and human beings is found million years ago in Indian culture. In Indian culture nature is the sign of female. The nature and female are treated like a great power and mother.⁴ The thought of “*Vasudhaivakutumbakam*” in Indian tradition sounds the holistic or ecological view.

So now we should talk about the Buddhist view on environment through ‘*pratītyasamutpāda*’ or dependent origination, which is the center point of this research. Dependent origination stands for causation in Buddhist philosophy. It offers a satisfactory link between cause and effect working at various levels. In the beginning it was mainly considered from the moral point of view, but the later Buddhist philosophical works widened its scope and intensified its working in a more dynamic manner.⁵ *Nāgārjuna* in *Mādhyamika* kārika pointed out that dependent origination is emptiness. He said that “what is originating co-dependently, we call emptiness. It is designation based upon (some material). Only this is the middle path.”⁶ Later its whole structure is designated as a chariot in the worldly sense. The chariot has no independent status and since it originates dependently, it lacks its own nature.

In the modern world one of the main issues that required urgent and complete answers is the conflict among national and religions. This has become the main threat to the global peaceful environment and co-existence. There is no question of loving one’s own religion or nationality because they represent one’s identity among the others. One becomes so special among the others because of his/her particular language or faith. To view this position from anthropologically, the human culture is a production of both nationality and religion. Even in modern culture both of them play very important parts to integrate individuals. However the problem arises when keeping the identities among diversities. To understand the reality of this question and to have a right view

on this there should be an intellectual as well as a rational outlook. Unlike in the past the modern youth is well equipped with the knowledge of science, technology and rational thinking. This is the time to enlighten them for a global co-existence. In other world to so the world the way to keep the identity while accepting diversity. Some views identified for environment conservation through dependent origination-

● **Co-existence :**

In Buddhist philosophy one of the theoretical views is the *pratītyasamutpāda* (*paṭīccasamuppāda* in *pālī*) or dependent origination. This theory has a broad meaning in the Buddhist context. However to put this theory into simpler form one would call it as the Buddhist casual theory. This means that nothing in the world independent. Everything depends on others. This theory clearly emphasizes that there is nothing in the universe separated from others. If somebody thinks he/she can live isolated from other things in the universe, according to Buddhism it is the state of ordinary thinking. The Buddhist theory of dependent origination can be applied as rational way of thinking. Any particular religion or nationality can be identified identically from others because of their existence. They are interdependent and mutually existence. In more scientific way to say that difference are relative to the others.

Modern science also says that Deep ecology is the universal worldview and the integrative tendency. Deep ecology is eco-centric. "Deep ecology does not separate humans- or anything else- from the natural environment. It does see the world not as a collection of isolated objects but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life".⁷ The deep ecological awareness is spiritual or religious awareness.

● **Cause and effect :**

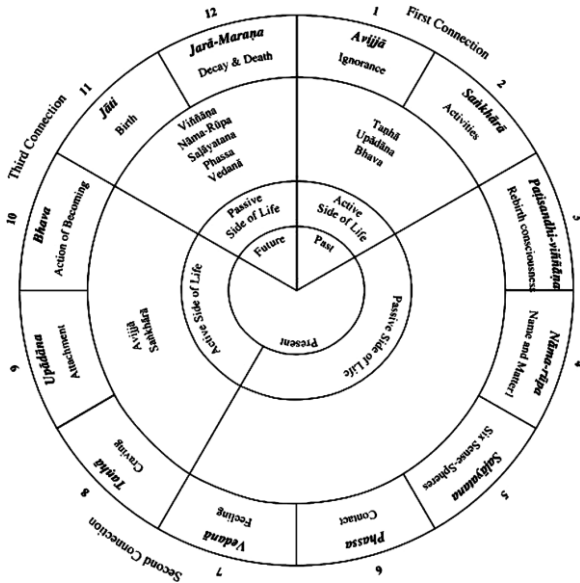
Every philosophy has its cause and effect theory. That called '*kārya-kāraṇvāda*'. In Buddhist philosophy this theory called *pratītyasamutpāda*. *Pratītyasamutpāda* theory is the core concept of Buddhism that interprets the nature of existence by means of a casual theory. However *pratītyasamutpāda* as a casual completely different from other theories of that like as it not only explains the causes of existence but also envisages the cessation of existence. As Buddhism understands the knowledge of *pratītyasamutpāda* is very crucial because it paves the way to find causes and ultimately that helps to eliminate the causes. Through the destruction of causes any type of problem can be solved. Therefore in the Buddhist context the insight and profound knowledge of *pratītyasamutpāda* is paramount important especially to overcome man's basic problem of suffering in the world existence.

This theory can also apply with nature. If we try to find the causes of environmental degradation, we can solve this problem definitely. Because for the imbalance in ecosystem and environmental pollution some causes are responsible. Today global warming, air and water pollution are the big problems in front of us, these are the results of some causes and causes are not separate from the actions and effects.

So the *pratītyasamutpāda* is the central philosophy in Buddhism that gives two distinctive meanings. The origin of suffering (*dukkha*) as well as cessation of suffering can be well realized by the knowledge of dependent origination.

Pratītyasamutpāda

The Wheel of Life



Interconnectedness :

The view of interconnectedness and interdependence is very important for the protection of environment. One of the main objects behind the Buddhist teaching of dependent origination is to show the relative relationship among human beings as well as the nature. This can be viewed from two stand points. One is from a deep and broad perspective in the context of cyclic existence. The *sānsārik* existence according to the Buddhist doctrine is innumerable and empirically cannot be assumed the begging or the end. So that this long cyclical existence had created interconnectedness as well as interdependence in many forms. It is very interesting to note here that it is not only the man but also the other types of animals also had been relations of some forms in this long existence. But it is very difficult to perceive this world relative

connection as the man in the present situation acquires only a confined knowledge of this world existence. This is the basic problem of knowledge which is called *avidyā* (*avijjā*) or ignorance in the twelve link formula of dependent origination.

Environmental science also defined that there is no fundamental structure in this world, but one thing is there i.e. the energy. There is a horizontal process nothing is vertical. Fritjof Capra says that “the recognition that mass is a form of energy. Subatomic particles are not made of any material stuff, they are patterns of energy. Energy, however, is associated with activity, with process, and this implies that the nature of subatomic particles is intrinsically dynamic. Dynamic patterns continually changing into one-another continuously dance of energy”.⁸

Right consumption and sustainable development :

Sustainable development may be defined as the usages of natural resources pursuit in way to fulfilling the today’s need in such a way of without ignoring the future generation’s needs. Responsible consumption and sustainable development are complimentary to each other. Today we are living in modern society renders technical and scientific atmosphere. So called science and modernity brought drastic change and massive transformation in socio-political order. The behaviour and feelings of the modern human are now changed in day to day life.

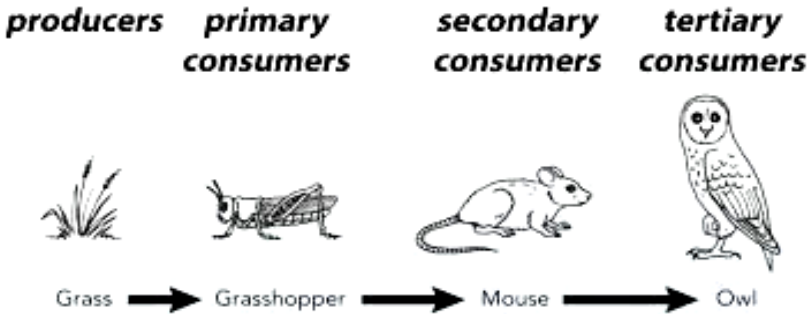
Today the view of the holistic or deep ecological, which we seeing through the modern science, that can be recall from Buddhism. The Buddhist view of human life in the universe originates from insights from Shakyamuni’s enlightenment. He set in meditation under the Bodhi tree and explored the “universe within.” He was able to recognize in the depths of his own life, the inseparability of the source of life and the universe in which it was conceived⁹. This inner journey led him beyond the realm of the individual to the transpersonal. This allows one to feel ties beyond

relationship of family or community, beyond ties of race or nationality. Even beyond that of humanity, outward to the ties with nature and biosphere. And finally become one with the universe itself. That can be seen also through the *pratityasamutpāda*¹⁰, there is a network of causes and effects and all are interdependent. Everything in the universe is connected by a thread of dependent origination. The universal life force, which carries out actions of compassion, exists in a complex network of causes and effects. Through the process of evolution of life and the physical world, including the working of nature's ecosystem, an intelligent form of life called humanity came into existence. Through the holistic world view the whole world is observed like a cycle. In this holistic worldview, there is no dominating view point rather it is a view of co-operation.

According to the Buddhist point of view true happiness cannot be found through mundane activities alone. Only the noble path to enlightenment is a path from suffering, enlightenment in this sense is not a mere liberation from the oppression of a particular ideology, but liberation from cyclic existence. So finally, from the base point of Buddhism, religion is not an obstacle to enlightenment, but is instead the only vehicle to enlightenment and holistic world view¹¹.

As we talked about that our practice of non-violence applies not just to human beings but to all sentient beings, any living thing that has a mind¹². It is not at all wrong for humans to use nature to make useful things, but we must not exploit nature to make unnecessarily. It is good to live in a house, to have medicines, and to be able to drive somewhere in a car. But everything has its limit. Too much consumption or effort to make money is no good. Neither is too much contentment. In principle, contentment is a goal, but pure contentment becomes almost like suicide¹³. There is a food chain in environment. One consumer depends on another one. This cyclic process called food web. Exempted to human being

every sentient being consume the particular thing on that it's depends.



The teachings of Buddha specifically four noble truths and eight fold paths are very significant to overcome the side effects of consumerism. Buddha said that mindfulness is the one way to achieve the end of suffering. Mindfulness is essential even in our daily life in which we act in full awareness of our actions, feelings, and thoughts as well as that of our environment. The mind should always be clear and free from desires, leading to satisfaction, i.e.-

- Right views (*Samyaka Driṣṭi*)
- Right thought (*Samyaka Saṃkalpa*)
- Right speech (*Samyaka Vācā*)
- Right conduct (*Samyaka Karmānta*)
- Right livelihood (*Samyaka Ajīva*)
- Right effort (*Samyaka Vyāyāma*)
- Right mindfulness (*Samyaka Sati*)
- Right meditation (*Samyaka Samādhi*)¹⁴

Thus Buddhism has a rich ethical tradition for every single being. Buddhist tradition is very close to environment. Indian people were so close with environment from very beginning. The modern science is talking about environment from around one century, but Indian seers and people were very conscious about environment from thousands and thousands year ago.

Pratītyasamutpāda is a basic tool of Buddhist philosophy to understand the whole Buddhist knowledge tradition.

Notes and References :

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- ² Capra, Fritjof. *The Web of Life*, p.25.
- ³ Jamieson, Dale. *The Heart of Environmentalism*, US: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2007, p.30-31.
- ⁴ *Sā no bhūmirvisrjatām mātā putrāy me payah. - Pṛthvī Sūkt, 12|1|10*
Mātā bhūmih putro aham pṛthivyāh. - Ibid, 12|1|12
- ⁵ Sharma, T.R. *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy (Vijñānavāda and Mādhyamika)*, p.98
- ⁶ yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ sūnyatām taṃ pracakṣamahe | sā prajñāptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā ||- *Mādhyamakāśāstra*, 24.8, Ed. D.D. Shastri, Varanasi, 1983, p.220.
- ⁷ Capra, Fritjof. *The Web of Life*, London: Harper Collins publishers, 1997, page 7
- ⁸ Capra, Fritjof. *The Tao of Physics*, page 362
- ⁹ Sabbabhibhū sabbavidhamsmi sabbesu dhammesu anūpalitto | sabbñjaha taṇhakkhaye vimutto sayṃ abhiññāya kamuddiseyyṃ ||, *Dhammapada*, Taṇhāvaggo, 20
- ¹⁰ Apratītya samutpanno dharmah kaścina vidyate | yasmāttasmādaśūnyo hi dharmah kaścina vidyate ||, *mūlamādhyamikakārikā*, 24.19
- ¹¹ Sabba pāpassa akaraṇṃ kusalassa upasṃpadā | sacitta pariyodapanṃ etāna Buddhānusāsanṃ ||, *Dhammapada*, Buddhavaggo, 5
- ¹² ye keci pāṇa bhūtatthi tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā, dīghā vā ye mahantā vā mjjhimā rassakā aṇukathulā | Diṭṭhā vā ye vā adiṭṭhā ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre, bhūtā sambhavesī vā sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā | - karaṇimetta sutta, gāthā 4-5.
- ¹³ Kirthisinghe, B.P. *Buddhism and Science*, p.61
- ¹⁴ *Mahāvagga* Pāli, (New Nālandā Mahāvihāra Edition, 1956), p.13

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