

History of Ecological crisis and diverse Buddhist response for it's solution

Phra Wichian Hualkhoksung*

*Department of Pali & Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Arts, Banaras Hindu University

From starting generation human lived with the nature. They took water, food, and shelter from nature. What they took from nature, it was recharged by nature. Because of the increase in the population as well as their needs human are now destroying nature. Human has harmed this so much that it became dangerous for human survival itself. Data of this destruction is very surprising and alarming. Every minute, 12,000 tons of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) are added to the environment 51 acres of tropical rainforest are destroyed. Every hour, 1692 productive acres of land become desert, as result 1800 children die of malnutrition (*Environmental statistics*, 2012). Global temperature is rising and the rate is predicted to be between 2 and 6 degrees centigrade per 10 years depending on disturbances in weather and crop patterns (Meehl et al, 2007 p.).¹ Increase in Green house gases e.g. Carbon Dioxide (CO₂), methane have caused the Global warming. Human activities such as deforestation misuse and excess use of natural resources have the intensified Global warming. The Global warming with human activities is responsible for rise in Average temperature, shrinking of glaciers decreasing of underground water level, more frequent Droughts, floods, rising of sea level etc. This problem has become now a kind of Crisis. Since it is related to whole ecology, so it is an Ecological Crisis.²

Whole crisis is linked with cause and effect relationship. The causes of ecological crisis are industrialization, deforestation, over population, and Capacity of bearing. Industrialization is root

cause of all causes. Its history goes back to 18th century. Industrialization first started in Britain in 1760. From Britain it spread to other countries such as Belgium (1820s), France (1815–1860), Germany (1850–1890), Sweden (1790–1815), United States (1860s) and Japan 1877.³

Urbanization is directly related to Industrialization. According to U.N. report World Urbanization Prospects: the 2011 Revision, The global proportion of urban population rose dramatically from 13% (220 million) in 1900 to 29% (745 million) in 1950, to 49% (3.2 billion) in 2005, to 52.1% (3.6 billion) in 2011. The projected figure for 2030 is 60% (4.9 billion).⁴

Cities are the main polluters and centers of urban heat islands. Chicago and Cincinnati were the first two American cities to enact Law ensuring cleaner air in 1881. Extreme smog were experienced by the cities of Los Angeles and Donora, Pennsylvania in the late 1940's. The Great Smog of 1952 in London killed at least 4000 people. Thus pollution began to draw major public attention in the U.S. and West European countries between the mid 1950's and early 1970's. Many acts and provisions passed to deal with air, water, noise pollutions control.⁵ These developed countries controlled pollution at some extent. Even West European countries are quickly going for renewable energy sources.⁶

Although Industrialization and Urbanization started in developed countries, now, developing countries have more urban population and number of Mega cities than developed countries.

¹ Meehl et al., 2007 *Global Climate Projections*, Section 10.5: Quantifying the Range of Climate Change, in IPCC AR4 WG1 2007.

² <http://www.skepticalscience.com/empirical-evidence-for-global-warming.htm>

³

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urbanization>

⁵

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution

⁶ Roselund, Christian, Europe's Energy Transformation (www.ecobuddhism.org)

Mega cities are the first cities where industries were introduced. Industries are the root cause of urbanization. Other reasons behind urbanization are employment, services including medical facility and education. By 1970, the world had only two megacities: Tokyo and New York. Since then their number has increased markedly and most new megacities have arisen in developing countries. Today, Asia has 13 megacities, Latin America has four, and Africa, Europe and Northern America have two each. Thirteen of those megacities are capitals of their countries. By 2025, megacities is expected to reach 37, Asia would have gained another nine, Latin America two, and Africa, Europe and Northern America one each. This indicates a clear trend of accelerated urban concentration in Asia.⁷

Rapid Urbanization decreases agricultural land it is apt for India and China who comprises one third population of whole world. Increased urban population will increase food demand in these two countries agricultural production is stagnant for more than ten years. This increase demand of food will increase more dependency on imported agricultural products of Latin American and African countries. This will draw more pressure for deforestation and fresh water consumption for crop production in these two continents. Thus there will be less jungle with less oxygen. This will ultimately accelerate ecological crisis of whole world. The time is running out various conventions and Negotiations are not working or failed.⁸ But organizational (governmental and nongovernmental) and individual efforts are continuously working to save this earth.

Buddhism has philosophical solution of these problems .World especially west was seeking a solution eagerly. At that time, Thich Nhat Hanh, coined the term Engaged Buddhism, which has grown in popularity in the West. But I think, Buddhism was always engaged for welfare of people. The Buddha has advised his disciples to wander for the benefit of many and for the happiness of many: '*Caratha Bhikkhave Cārikam, Bahujana hitāya, Bahujana sukhāya, Lokānukampāya ...*'. Go your ways, O monks!

⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division

World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision, p. 5

⁸ <http://www.pantaneto.co.uk/issue47/smith.htm>

for the welfare of many, for the benefit of many, out of compassion for the world. (*Mahāvagga I, 32, Mārakathā; Vin. i. 21*)

Now Buddhism is actively engaged to solve all social problems including ecological crisis.⁹ Especially, when there is matter of nature and human survival, the Buddhist response would be inevitable. There is some Buddhist response. These responses can be divided into three categories –

1. Individual response of Monks and lay person.
2. Response of international networks of engaged Buddhist.
3. Response of World Bank and other organizations who are recognizing Buddhist faith for Ecological solution.

1. Individual response of Monks and lay person.

Under this category individual Buddhist takes initiative to overcome ecological crisis. These efforts are not linked with any international Buddhist or welfare organization. These responses are based on sense of right–wrong understanding that something is not good and something should be done for betterment. When somebody takes a good initiative other persons also start working on his direction. There are two examples from Thailand and Australia with different attitudes to deal with ecological crisis without help of international organizations:

A: Wat Plak Mai Lai Forest Monastery of Bangkok in Thailand

Wat Plak Mai Lai is a densely-wooded forest monastery outside of Bangkok in Nakhon Pathom Province of Thailand. Thanks to Abbot Phra Acharn Somneuk Natho's "non-interventionist" approach to forest management. Wat Plak Mai Lai is the last remaining natural forest of Thailand.¹⁰

In 1937, a Chinese merchant donated this land for the construction of a temple. Earlier it was desiccated and infertile land after serving as a

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Engaged_Buddhism

¹⁰ Ekachai, Sanitsuda, 1994 "Allowing Trees to Grow" in *Seeds of Hope: Local Initiatives in Thailand*, pp.124–29.

tobacco plantation. Although the first abbot let the trees grow back naturally, the second and third abbots cleared the forest for fuel. The fourth abbot let nature take its course again but left the monastery after a few years. Phra Acharn Somneuk became abbot in the mid 1980s, when the land around the monastery was sparsely wooded.¹¹ After planting a variety of tree saplings, the young abbot concluded that the forest would recover best if left alone. In contrast to governmental reforestation policies, Phra Acharn Somneuk believed that community involvement and minimal intervention was the best approach to reforestation. Local villagers were invited to share their knowledge about medicinal herbs and participate in workshops at the monastery. Eventually, the villagers stopped clear-cutting and the land recovered its dense forest cover.¹²

B: Buddhist response in Australasia

An excellent example of a Buddhist inspired project that recognizes interbeing is John Seed's Rainforest Information Centre (1994). Though, this centre is based in Australia, it supports rainforest preservation projects throughout the world and is an excellent example of sustainable development based on Buddhist principles. All money that John Seed earns running workshops goes to support rainforest projects in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Ecuador and other destinations. He has been innovator of the sustainable walkabout sawmill project in Papua New Guinea where local people are given an option to work their forests sustainably and avoid the exploitation of large scale multinational logging companies.¹³ They are provided with the small saws to log sustainably in a manner that maintains the sustainability of their ecosystem creates employment and enables a rotational system within the forest logging to be maintained. It is an economic system that recognizes the needs of all species and is based on Buddhist values of *mettā*.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ekachai, Sanitsuda, 1994 "Allowing Trees to Grow" in *Seeds of Hope: Local Initiatives in Thailand*, pp.124-29.

¹³

www.buddhismandaustralia.com/index.php/articles/articles-2013/167-the-green-buddha-buddhism-and-sustainability-by-dr-patricia-sherwood-.html

¹⁴ Toh, S.W., 2010. *Engaged Buddhism and its contributions to Sustainable Development and ESD*,

2. Response of international networks of engaged Buddhist.

The international networks of Engaged Buddhism are an Organization of Buddhist people around the world. It was founded in Thailand. In...

Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Joanna Macy,¹⁵ Sulak Sivaraksa, Maha Ghosananda, Joan Halifax, and Bhikkhu Bodhi and other Engaged appealed Buddhist philosopher¹⁶ that Buddhists should now play an active role for human welfare including ecological solution. There are two examples from Japan and Cambodia.

A: Contribution of Japanese Buddhist Monks to help Fukushima Victims-

Japanese Engaged Buddhist Monks helped the people and contributed to overcome Fukushima disaster.

In wake of the tragic earthquake, tsunami and atomic disaster of Fukushima in past, there has been arisen citizen group forums seeking counseling from Buddhist monks. On their part, the monks are also eager to help and go beyond their call of duty to pacify frightened and sorrowful minds and sooth their nerves.¹⁷

In the Odaka Ward of Minami Soma City in Fukushima, Rev. Toku-un Tanaka the abbot of Dokei-ji temple, is helping Fukushima victims to rebuilding family community and their villages, In Kurihara, Miyagi Prefecture, Tsudaiji Temple's chief priest, Taio Kaneda came up with the brilliant idea of starting a mobile café. Since May last year, he has been doing the rounds of temporary housing complexes and other such places, and offered distraught people a drink while listening to their

pp. 62- 66.
[www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/upload/s/16 Accessed 31-12-12.](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/upload/s/16%20Accessed%2031-12-12)

¹⁵ Justify Your Love: Finding Authority for Socially Engaged Buddhism (www.urbandharma.org/udharma7/engaged.html)

¹⁶ Engaged Spirituality (www.bahaistudies.net/asma/engaged_spirituality.pdf), p.10

¹⁷ Rev. Taitsu Kono <http://jneb.jp/english>

worries with a patient ear. He offers the survivors advice on how to cope with the loss and the memories of their departed loved ones.¹⁸

In the disaster-struck Tohoku region, the deputy chief priest of Shingyoji Temple in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, bought the necessary equipments with donations and other funds to facilitate the radiation testing.¹⁹

B: Central Cardamom Protected Forest Primary

The Central Cardamom Protected Forest, a 402,000-hectare area in southwestern Cambodia's Central Cardamom Mountains, is the source of some of the country's largest rivers and safeguards a vital watershed.²⁰

As part of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot, it also conserves critical habitat for most of Cambodia's large mammal species, including the Asian elephant, Indochinese tiger and Malaysian sun bear,²¹ and Endangered Siamese crocodile.

The Global Conservation Fund (GCF) supports on-site surveillance and enforcement systems by Conservation International's Cambodia Program to provide immediate protection for the area, which is under threat from illegal logging and hunting activities.²²

The program advises the Royal Government of Cambodia on protected area management, as well as training and patrolling.

3. Response of World Bank and other organizations, who are recognizing Buddhist faith for Ecological solution-

World Bank and other non Buddhist organizations e.g. ARC (Alliance of Religions and Conservation) has realized that major part of world population, is Buddhist. Buddhist Monks have credibility and respect in society. People

obey their teaching. For quick and reliable ecological output, World Bank believes on Buddhist infrastructure for better assessment of ecological problems and for its better solutions. There are two examples from Cambodia and Mongolia where World Bank and Non Buddhist Organizations are working for ecological solution, with good rapport of Buddhist monasteries.²³

Ecological Experience in Mongolia:

A: Onstar Isei Lin Monastery

The Onstar Isei Lin Monastery built in 1996 in Baganuur District, some 140 kilometres west of Ulaanbaatar, launched a major project in October, 2005 to document the environmental and health impacts of the Baganuur coal mine. The mine extracts some 2.5 million tons of coal every year, most of which is sent to Ulaanbaatar which relies on the mine for 70 percent of its coal.²⁴

The project, supported by the World Bank's NEMO²⁵ fund, was a response to the suspicion that the mine's operations were impacting seriously on residents' health, as well as that of the miners. Baganuur mine is indeed having a significant negative effect on local residents' health, as well as the health of the local environment. The mine's impact extends to Ulaanbaatar where the coal is consumed.²⁶

B: Cambodian Pagodas become eco-centres

After years of suppression under the Khmer Rouge and the unrest that followed, Cambodian people are rebuilding a sense of community. In order to protect the environment, Since 2005 the ABE²⁷ has been creating a network of monks and strengthening the *Saṅgha*, or community of Buddhist monks and nuns from all of Cambodia's 23 provinces, The ABE was founded in Phnom Penh on 9th March 2005 with

¹⁸ www.inebnetwork.org

¹⁹ <http://japandailynews.com/buddhist-monks-take-on-an-active-role-in-counseling-citizens-especially-after-the-disaster-134156/>

²⁰ www.conservation.org/global/gcf/portfolio/asia_pacific/Pages/cardamoms.aspx

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Chimedsegee, Urantsatsral, et al., 2009. *Mongolian Buddhists Protecting Nature: A Handbook on Faiths, Environment and Development*, p. 38

²⁴ <http://arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=467>

²⁵ NEMO = Netherlands-Mongolia Trust Fund for Environmental Reform.

²⁶ <http://arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=467>

²⁷ ABE = Association of Buddhists for the Environment

the presence of His Eminence of Sangaraja Bou Kry. It was supported by ARC²⁸ as the consultants of World Bank Asia Faiths/Forest Initiative and for the outreach workshops and training it worked closely with the conservation NGO, Mlup Baitong.²⁹

It is part of the Asian Buddhist Network, initially set up with the help of ARC and the World Bank, and run by monks for monks. It provides capacity building, training and advice for monks throughout the country. Under its director, Venerable Hiek Sopheap it also produces films and educational material, runs tree nurseries and also is engaged in a programme to ordain trees, as monks are ordained, in order to protect them and the forest around them.³⁰

Conclusion Buddhism should be respected as more scientific, logical religion and more apt in today's disturbing scenario comparison to other contemporary religions. If Buddhism remove some common structural problems this will be the most popular religion of future. The Buddhist philosophy will not only determine the Ecological policy of world but also play decisive role to give direction to various fields including Technological, Industrial, Energy policy, Social, Political, and Economical and so on.

Buddhism can change the way of thinking in very positive and constructive manner. Buddhist Philosophy can initiate a sustainable and beautiful world. This will be the most remarkable contribution of the Buddha's teaching in today's totally different Scenario.

As there is a positive relation between wholesome actions and good attitudes and healthy ecology, Buddha has suggests that the actor should be calm, contended and stable mind. He should be pure, unencumbered and ready to act.³¹ In brief, the ultimate goal of Buddha is implementation of the wholesome actions, to achieve ecological balance.

References

- [1] Chimedsegee, Urantsatsral, et al., 2009. Mongolian Buddhists Protecting Nature: A Handbook on Faiths, Environment and

Development, Mongolia: Published in Ulaanbaatar.

- [2] Ekachai, Sanitsuda, 1994. "Allowing Trees to Grow" in *Seeds of Hope: Local Initiatives in Thailand*, Bangkok: Thai Development Support Committee.
- [3] Horner, I. B., Trans. The Book of Discipline, 6 vols, London: Pali Text Society, 1970-86.
- [4] Meehl et al., 2007. *Global Climate Projections*, Section 10.5: Quantifying the Range of Climate Change, in IPCC AR4 WG1.
- [5] Payutto, P.A., 1993. *Good, Evil and Beyond. Karma in Buddha's teaching*, Bangkok: Buddha Dhamma Foundation.
- [6] Toh, S.W. 2010. *Engaged Buddhism and its contributions to Sustainable Development and ESD*. www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/uploads/16 Accessed 31-12-12.
- [7] Web Sides:
- [8] <http://arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=321>
- [9] <http://arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=467>
- [10] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Engaged_Buddhism
- [11] <http://www.pantaneto.co.uk/issue47/smith.htm>
- [12] <http://www.skepticalscience.com/empirical-evidence-for-global-warming.htm>
- [13] www.conservation.org/global/gcf/portfolio/asia_pacific/Pages/cardamoms.aspx
- [14] www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/uploads/16 Accessed 31-12-12
- [15] www.inebnetwork.org

²⁸ ARC = Alliance of Religions and Conservation

²⁹ <http://arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=321>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Payutto, P.A., 1993. *Good, Evil and Beyond. Karma in Buddha's teaching*, p.19