

Buddhist insights for pragmatic environmental conservation as shown in Vanaropa-sutta

Dinidu Sathsara Basnayake

Temporary Lecturer, Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Peradeniya
sathsaradinidu@gmail.com

The lack of environment-related knowledge has led mankind to the misleading idea of considering nature as the total contradiction of development. This has unexceptionally affected environmentalists' ideas. The hostile approach of environmental activists towards development projects might be beneficial, but not always. It is as harmful as capitalistic values which encourage creating more desires at the cost of nature. When environmentalist organizations work hard for an environment unaffected by development (which is, in fact unrealistic), many others attempt to make their lives more luxurious at the expense of nature. Both people equally hinder the betterment of mankind. Indeed the conflict between nature and culture is not new. The protection of environment should collaborate with a pragmatic and rational basis. How our ancestors worshipped nature out of fear is not the exact model which deserves for the twenty-first century equipped with better scientific and technological advancements. Development and environment should not sacrifice themselves for one another. Instead, both phenomena should be in a delicate balance. The present study shows how this attitude is shown in the *Vanaropa-sutta* in *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, an Early Buddhist discourse. In this discourse, the Buddha shows those who plant groves and build things for facilitating others grow their merits. This discourse discloses a kind of environmental activism which is not obstructive to the development for human well-being. It shows nature and man-made creatures can equally be beneficial some times. As a system of thought which encourages a “middle-way” philosophy, it is no wonder that Buddhism advocates a rational, experiential and pragmatic basis of environmental conservation.

Keywords: Environmentalist, Nature, Development, Pragmatic basis, “Middle-way” philosophy