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**An Awareness to Environmental and  
Ecological Awakening in Buddhism**

**Dr. Rajendra Ram, Patna**  
Retired Professor, Patna University



**Dharmadhar Smritirakha Samiti**  
**All India Federation of Bengali Buddhists**  
50T/1A, Pandit Dharmadhar Sarani,  
Kolkata-700 015

পাণ্ডিত ধর্মাধার মহাস্থবির  
৪র্থ স্মারক বক্তৃতা—২০১২

বৌদ্ধ দর্শনের আলোকে প্রাকৃতিক ভারসাম্য ও পরিবেশ সচেতনতা

ডঃ রাজেন্দ্র রাম  
ভূতপূর্ব অধ্যাপক, পাটনা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়



ধর্মাধার স্মৃতিরক্ষা সমিতি  
ও  
নিখিল ভারত বাঙালী বৌদ্ধ সংগঠন

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**R**ajendra Ram (b. 15 May, 1935) hailing from a peasant worker's family of East Champaran district of Bihar is an M.A. in History and Political Science from Bihar University, Mazaffarpur where he acquired his academic qualifications during 1952-1960 followed by a Ph. D. Degree from Patna University in 1968. His thesis entitled *A History of Buddhism in Nepal : A.D. 704-1396* (published by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1975) enabled him to earn the blessings of the Late Ven. Sanghanayak Dr. Dharmapal Mahathera of Bengal Buddhist Association. Dr. Ram also got U.G.C. Senior Research Fellowship (1970-1972) for accomplishing his Post-Doctoral work on *The Society and Polity of Nepal (A.D. 700-1400)*. He is a Vice-President of International Meditation Centre and Bengal Buddhist Association in addition to being a member of the Board of Editors of the *Jagajjyoti*, the journal founded by Ven. Karmayogi Kripasaran Mahathera. He is a retired Professor of History, Patna University and his residential address is **Vani Vihara, Garahua Tola (Devasthan), Sultanganj, Patna-800006 (Bihar), India**. He knows Hindi, (Bhojpuri, Maithili, Vajjika-local languages of Bihar), English, Nepali and a little Bengali. He is constantly rendering his services to the cause of Buddhism because of his close association with the Bengal Buddhist Association and with the International Meditation Centre, Buddhagaya. He has published a few books and articles, more than hundred. He is also the Editor of a journal, *History : Past and Present (A Bilingual Journal of Research)*. His favourite subject of study is Buddhism and Marxism.



## পণ্ডিত ধর্মাধার মহাস্থবির স্মরণে

পণ্ডিত ধর্মাধার মহাস্থবির ছিলেন বিংশ শতকে ভারত-বাংলা উপমহাদেশের একজন বিশিষ্ট সাংখ্যিক ব্যক্তিত্ব। বিদ্যায়-পাণ্ডিত্যে, জ্ঞানে-গরিমায়, ত্যাগে-তিতিক্ষায় তিনি ছিলেন বরণ্য মহাপুরুষ।

ধর্মাধার মহাস্থবিরের চিন্তার স্বচ্ছতা, জ্ঞানের গভীরতা এবং বাংলা ভাষায় দক্ষতা প্রমাণিত হয় তাঁর রচিত গ্রন্থসমূহে, বিভিন্ন পত্রপত্রিকায় প্রকাশিত প্রবন্ধে এবং নালন্দা পত্রিকার সম্পাদনায়। পাণ্ডিত্যের স্বীকৃতি মিলেছে রাষ্ট্রপতি পুরস্কার এবং এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটি প্রদত্ত ডঃ বি. সি. লাহা স্বর্ণপদক প্রাপ্তিতে।

ভিক্ষুসংঘের নিকট তিনি ছিলেন একজন আদর্শ সংঘনায়ক এবং ভারতীয় সংঘরাজ ভিক্ষুমহাসভার প্রথম সংঘরাজ। বিভিন্ন সদৃগণের সমাবেশে ভক্তবৃন্দের কাছে তিনি ছিলেন পরমারাধ্য ধর্মগুরু।

তাঁর পুণ্য স্মৃতিকে অমর রাখার উদ্দেশ্যে কয়েকটি উদ্যোগ ইতিমধ্যে গ্রহণ করা হয়েছে। গঠিত হয়েছে ধর্মাধার স্মৃতিরক্ষা সমিতি, যার উদ্যোগে প্রতিবৎসর পালিত হয় ধর্মাধার জয়ন্তী উৎসব। পণ্ডিত ধর্মাধার ওয়েলফেয়ার ট্রাস্ট ধর্মাধার শতবার্ষিকী ভবন যথাশীঘ্র সমাপ্ত করে শিক্ষা ও নানাবিধ কল্যাণকর্মে লিপ্ত থাকতে অঙ্গীকারবদ্ধ। তদুদ্দেশ্যে, সম্প্রতি গঠিত হয়েছে পণ্ডিত ধর্মাধার ওয়েলফেয়ার সোসাইটি। সহযোগী সংস্থা নিখিল ভারত বাঙালী বৌদ্ধ সংগঠনের নেতৃত্ববৃন্দ এবং কর্মীরা পণ্ডিত ধর্মাধার মহাস্থবিরের আদর্শে অনুপ্রানিত। সব সংগঠনের অতীত এবং বর্তমান কর্মকাণ্ড অনুষ্ঠিত হয় বিদর্শন শিক্ষাকেন্দ্রে যেখানে পণ্ডিত ধর্মাধার মহাস্থবিরের অস্তিমকাল অতিবাহিত হয়েছিল। তাঁদের যৌথ প্রচেষ্টায় ২০০৯ সাল থেকে প্রচলন করা হয়েছে পণ্ডিত ধর্মাধার মহাস্থবির স্মারক বক্তৃতা।

প্রথম স্মারক বক্তৃতা প্রদান করেছিলেন অধ্যাপক সুনীতি কুমার পাঠক “অভ্যুদয়ের পথে বাঙালী বৌদ্ধ চেতনা” প্রসঙ্গে। দ্বিতীয় ও তৃতীয় স্মারক বক্তৃতা প্রদান করেন যথাক্রমে প্রয়াত অধ্যাপিকা ডঃ আশা দাস এবং অধ্যাপক ডঃ দীপক কুমার বড়ুয়া—“বৌদ্ধ চিকিৎসা বিজ্ঞান” এবং “সুশাসন, কল্যান অর্থনীতি এবং স্বচ্ছামৃত্যু ফলিত বৌদ্ধ ধর্মের প্রেক্ষাপটে” বিষয়ে। আজকের বক্তৃতার বিষয়বস্তু হল “An Awareness to Environmental and Ecological Awakening in Buddhism” অর্থাৎ বৌদ্ধধর্মে পরিবেশ এবং প্রাকৃতিক ভারসাম্য জাগরণের সচেতনতা।

পণ্ডিত ধর্মাধার মহাস্থবিরের ১১২তম জন্মতিথিতে উক্ত বিষয়ে জ্ঞানগর্ভ ভাষণ প্রদানের জন্য আমরা পাটনা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের ভূতপূর্ব অধ্যাপক, ইতিহাসবিদ এবং বৌদ্ধ শাস্ত্রজ্ঞ গবেষক ডঃ রাজেন্দ্র রামের প্রতি বিশেষ কৃতজ্ঞ।

কলকাতা

২৭শে জুলাই, ২০১২

ব্রহ্মাণ্ড প্রতাপ বড়ুয়া

সভাপতি

ধর্মাধার স্মৃতিরক্ষা সমিতি

পণ্ডিত ধর্মাধার ওয়েলফেয়ার ট্রাস্ট  
নিখিল ভারত বাঙালী বৌদ্ধ সংগঠন

Development leads to disaster of natural resources, because it creates ecological imbalance which is a menace. Media all over the world plays a praiseworthy role in creating awareness to this contradiction of development and disaster side by side. Researchers and human activists have been attempting on global level for suitable environmental management. United Nations organization held a conference in 1972 in Stockholm for the first time to pay serious attention to this problem. Later many non-governmental organizations engaged themselves for maintaining a balance between development and disaster. Some corporate houses which have been active and connived with the government for their selfish end of profit in the grab of providing material facilities to people are the real villains of society. In these complex circumstances emerge the giant force of corruption.

It is a fact that during last several decades we witnessed much growth. But that growth was achieved at the cost of huge amount of consumption of natural resources. This growth philosophy is the product of tremendous misuse and abuse of what are life lines of living beings on this earth. Interaction of civilization and ecology has led to an exercise of technocratic mentality which also operates within a self-centred vision creating eco-crisis. Generally in our society problems of ecocrisis are solved through a peaceful approach of religious and cultural forces.

Our much praised and intellectually relished Vedic heritage, the Brahmins left a bad legacy of violence and disaster of natural resources leading to eco-crisis and environmental pollution. As quoted by Maurice Winternitz (*History of Indian Literature*, vol. I, p. 187), "However interesting the Brahmanas may be to students of Indian Literature, they are of small interest to the general reader. The greater portion of them is simply twaddle, and what is worse, theological twaddle. No person who is not acquainted beforehand with the place which the Brahmanas fill in the history of the Indian mind, could read more than ten pages without being disgusted." In addition to social pollution on account of its exclusive policy based on caste system, the Brahmanas are full of cruel and ruthless practices of sacrifices, burning of plants, killing of animals in the garb



of holy *yajnas*. "Nothing is more significant for the Brahmanas than the tremendous importance which is ascribed to the sacrifice. The sacrifice is here no longer the means to an end, but it is an aim in itself, indeed, the highest aim of existence (Ibid, p: 197)." It is well stated, "Thus already in the Brahmanas the way is prepared for that great movement to which Buddhism owes its origin : for it cannot be questioned that the old and Brahmanas belong to the Pre-Buddhist period (Ibid, p. 201).

Of all, Buddhism has huge and practical solution leading to the thesis of restraint of desire, achieving enlightenment through renunciation and contemplation. Buddhist ethics of non-injury, loving kindness for all beings, respect, humility, care and compassion provides boundless relief. There is a definite link between technological hazards or realities and Buddhist view of existence. Buddhist experiments made in the past had already manifested the success of application of above mentioned essentials of peace, productivity and patience. One can mitigate the negative effects of absolute developmental action through the concept of impermanent formations (*Sabbe sankhara anicca*). Environmental ethics in Buddhist art, architecture and literature present an eye-opening solution to development and disaster. Law of causation (*Paticcasamuppada*) very well elucidates an awareness to environmental balance. Buddhist concern or serious thinking for other beings directly inspires on to *metta*, loving kindness. Buddhist monks and lay followers treat natural beauty as a source of great joy, an aesthetic content. A true Buddhist purges himself of sensuous pleasures through detached and dispassionate appreciation a even application. The *Theragatha* is replete with this type of instance. Theras compare rays of the sun passing over mountains to blush on a sensitive face, they see drops of tear in dew drops, lips of their beloved in a rose petal. But an appreciation of Buddhist *Bhikkhus* is different, because their impression about beauty is free from sensuous tones and self-projected views. For example expression of beauty by Mahakassapa may be pursued :

"These rocky heights with hue of dark blue clouds,  
Where lie embossed many shining lakes,  
Of crystal-clear, cool water and whose slopes,

The herds of Indra cover and bedeck,  
Those are the hills wherein my soul delights.”<sup>1</sup>

There are some significant points related with environmental ethics in *Anguttara Nikaya*.<sup>2</sup> Once the Buddha addressed the monks while relaxing in Ambapali's grove near Vaisali. It concerned with disintegration of the world, because it is dynamic, constantly changing. In this connection the Buddha predicated about appearance of seventh sun, burning of the earth, mount Sumeru, scarcity of cinder, oil, ghee and finally non-availability of even ash. The whole address indicates the effect of natural calamity. Then also man made calamity follows which shows an obvious link between moral conduct of man and nature. It leads to disaster by human made conduct. Although change is a natural factor in nature, the greatest adverse changes are created by man's moral decay leading to sorrow. The *Cakkavattisihanadasutta* of the *Digha-Nikaya* predicts future course of events leading to sad decay of human moral standard.<sup>3</sup> A very interesting discourse of the *Anguttara Nikaya* dwells upon the wanton greed, lust and wrong or misleading values of man leading to drought, failure of crops, epidemic etc. All this is followed by destruction of villages, towns, suburban settlements and depopulation of districts. Man and nature are really interdependent. Theravada or early Buddhism adhered to the concept of an intimate relationship between moral standard of man and natural phenomena or environment. Greed, hatred and delusion lead to pollution within and without dispelling evils on society. Wisdom, compassion and generosity lead to purity and progress in all walks of life of the living beings. The Buddha made explicit reference to mind : *Cittena nyati loko*.

Under the circumstances described above man is bound to depend on nature for his daily necessities (food, shelter, clothing, medicines etc.). It is well-known that through seasonal rainfall process, methods of conserving water by irrigation, soil types, physical condition for the growth of food crops, we learn to obtain better outputs from our agricultural efforts. But this learning must be followed by our moral restraint if we are to enjoy the benefits of natural resources. We must learn to satisfy our needs and to feed our greeds. Buddhism advocates



virtues of non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion in our material and spiritual pursuits. Greed leads to sorrow and injurious consequences. For all these Buddhism gives highest importance to *Santutthi* or contentment.

“Health is the greatest of gifts,  
Contentment the best riches;  
Trust is the best relationship,  
Nirvana the highest happiness,”<sup>5</sup>

The *Sigalovada Sutta* exhorts for non-aggressive attitude towards nature. In the light of this standard ideal or precept we should not collect only what we want leaving the remainder to rot. Buddhism condemns this type of selfish attitude. One may appreciate the following essentials of ecological balance :

“Whose is virtuous and intelligent,  
Shines like a fire that blazes (on hills),  
Its honey gathering (and hurting naught).  
Riches mount up as ant-heap growing high,  
When the good layman wealth has so amassed,  
Able is he to benefit his clan.  
In portions four let him divide that wealth,  
So binds he to himself life’s friendly things.”<sup>6</sup>

In a similar manner we should have gentle attitude towards plant and animal. The best and practical aspects of this attitude can be visualized in the doctrine of the *Pancasila*. A meticulous reference has been made to the pattern of growing vegetable : five kinds of propagation from roots, from stems, from joints, from cuttings *aggabija* and from seeds.<sup>7</sup> An excellent reference to the construction of parks and pleasure groves for public purpose leading to great meritorious deed is found in the *Burning Suttas* of the *Samyutta Nikaya* :

“Say of what folk by day and night,  
For ever doth the merit grow?  
In righteousness and virtuous might,  
What folk from earth to heaven go?  
Planters of groves and fruitful trees,

And they who build causeway and dam,  
And wells construct and watering sheds,  
And (to the homeless) shelter give,  
Of such as these by day and night,  
For ever doth the merit grow,  
In righteousness and virtues might,  
Such folk from earth to haven go.<sup>8</sup>

The *Majjhima Nikaya* refers to the most fine and delicate point pertaining to moderation in speech leading to virtue : four unwholesome vocal activities which should be avoided (falsehood, slander, harsh speech and frivolous talk).<sup>9</sup> Buddha's general advice to the monks regarding speech is to be followed while discussing the *Dhamma* or maintain noble silence as has been mentioned in the Ariyapariyesana Sutta.<sup>10</sup>

Flora and fauna have been described in the *Theragatha* in a highly splendid way. Peacocks, swans, cranes, elephants, frogs, deer and several other creatures have been seriously noticed in it. Of all, the Ven. Maha Kassapa refers to the Veluvana Vihara and others as the best alternative for his shelter.<sup>11</sup> It is a marvelous example of environmental and ecological awareness in Buddhist literature having no parallel in any other scriptural texts with this sense of awareness. The 36 lines of the verses are reminiscent of the present vision being emulated by international agencies and activists of non governmental organizations. Relevance of Buddhism to this effect can be manifested with full-throated logic and credibility.

Mahayana Buddhism irrespective of many comments and remarks against its inherent reality, adds a new dimension to the ethical norms of Theravada so far as its positive virtues related with practical essentials for development and disaster, environmental and ecological issues are concerned. Mahayana view of *Tathata* (suchness) profusely widens its approach to the problems of eco-crisis. The concept of *Tathagatagarbha* deals with both sources—Samsara (worldliness) and Nirvana (final bliss), shows a positive view of Samsara in which we survive. The only alternative optimism is the need of transmutation of *Paravritti* (mind) for attaining purification. Environmental ethical values emerge from the

concept of *Prajnaparamita* which deals with universal love devoid of ego, freedom from hate, pain and fear. These are essentials what are urgently needed for plants and insects in order to perpetuate ecological balance.

*The Origin of Specis* and *The Descent of Man* of Charls Darwin were revolutionary texts concerning life and nature. It paved an highway to ecosystem to balance and interaction in biological faculty. His view that there is not short discontinuity which separates man from animal life. This thought furnished a ground reality of ecology. One thinker, Donald K. Shearer in his "Buddhism and Ecology" : Challenge and Promise, (Earth Ethics, Vol. 10, No. 1), mentions and seriously takes notice of the fact that decisive events in the life of the Buddha occurred in natural settings : the Buddha was born and attained *nirvana* under trees. Further he says, historically in Asia and in the west, the Buddhists have established centers of practice and teaching in forests and among mountains at some remote places from the bustle and hustle of urban life. Therefore, the Buddha very emphatically in gently, sonorous and soothing tones exhorted : *Bahujan Hitaya, Bahujana Sukhaya, Lokamumpaya Charaivati, Charaivati, Charaivati.*

"Go forth on your journey, for the benefit of the many,  
For the joy of the many, out of compassion for the welfare,  
For the benefit and joy of all beings."<sup>13</sup>

The above mentioned message had led to the serious and committed views of Asoka, the Great Maurya Emperor towards ecological ethics propounded by Buddhism. It was this unique point which led to a remark expressed in Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (Vol. II, P. 27), that "Asoka's importance in history of Buddhism is second only to that of its founder. Rock Edict 13th shows that one hundred fifty thousand persons were deported, one hundred thousand were slain and many times that number died." These losses in Kalinga war amounted to the losses on the combatants by death, wounds or capture; the losses suffered by the families of the combatants thus suffered and the suffering caused to the friends of the bereaved or afflicted families. R.K. Mookherji has stated that Asoka is most modern in his estimate of the cruelties of war as



equally affecting the combatants and non-combatants or the civilian element, in a society based upon the joint family as the unit.<sup>14</sup> This deep and delicate sensitiveness to the cruel consequences of war marked a revolution in the character of Asoka.<sup>15</sup> It was a turning point in his life. From then onward he became active and devoted his life and state financial sources for conservation of plants, parks and forests, for the well-being of all creatures and above all for the people in general. He banned sacrifice of living creatures and put a limit to killing of only two peacocks and one deer for royal kitchen. He was the first ruler in human history who provided medical treatment for men and animals alike. He peacefully intervened in the regions of neighbouring kingdoms as well for creating an awareness to compassion and loving kindness to man, animals, plants, creatures and living being in any form. He replaced *Viharayata* by *Dhammayata*. Of all his Pillar Edict V (issued in 243 B.C., the 26th year of his reign) applied regulation for protection and nourishment of as many as forty-two types living beings. The Buddha has raised his strong voice against the killing of cows as is shown in the *Brahmana-dhammika Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipata*.<sup>16</sup> Rock Edict IV refers to an important imperial decree to suspend the *Bherighosha* and to institute a moral clarion-call, *Dhammaghosha*. He sent *Dharmadutas* to all directions for propagating this message of ecosystem through peace, friendship and universal brotherhood. His son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra went to Sri Lanka and his sister Charumati was sent to Nepal for implementing the ideals of *Dhamma* of Asoka. Many others were sent to different countries.

Asoka thus stands out as the pioneer of peace. He rightly recognized its foundation in the spirit and religion of universal non-violence (*Vihimsa bhutanama*) which alone could usher in the era of "Peace on Earth" (Santi) and Goodwill (*Priti*) among men"<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, environmental awareness through Buddhism is possible today and it is quite relevant to resolve the burning issue of eco-crisis. A mass action is necessary. Only Bills and Acts through the ruling class are not sufficient. It should be every man's concern. Buddhism provides the best and the only practical perspective for environmental and ecological balance, a present and future lease of life to all living beings.

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