

**MITIGATING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF NATURAL
DISASTERS IN RELATION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS;
SEARCHING SOLUTIONS THROUGH BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY**

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The field of environmental ethics concerns human beings' ethical relationship with the natural Environment. Environmental ethics believes that humans are a part of society as well as other living creatures, which include plants and animals. These items are very essential parts of the world and are considered to be a functional part of human life. Thus, it is essential that every human being respects and honors this and uses morals and ethics when dealing with these creatures. With the rapid increase in world's population, the consumption of natural resources has increased. This has degraded our planet's ability to provide the services we humans need. The consumption of resources is going at a faster rate than they can naturally refill.

The two fundamental questions that environmental ethics must address are: what duties do humans have with respect to the environment, and why? The latter question usually needs to be considered prior to the former. In order to identify what our responsibilities are, it is usually thought necessary to consider first why we have them.

In the global scale Pollution, Overpopulation, Industrial and Household Waste, Acid Rain, Climate change, Ozone Layer Depletion, Urban Sprawl, Genetic Engineering, Deforestation and Global Warming have been identified as major environmental issues. These environmental issues have taken toll on our environment and we've already started seeing some disastrous effects in the form of degradation of human health, rise in sea level, depletion of non-renewable resources, melting of glaciers,

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extinction of species, polluted landfills, toxic dust, decreasing soil fertility, rise in air and water pollution and many more. Human beings are considered to be the most intelligent species living on the Earth. This could be why it is the only type on the Earth which has civilized itself over the decades to a large extent. Today, human beings boast as being superior to all other animals but what is the use of such great intelligence when environment ethics are not followed?

The primary analytical method used in this study is content analysis. "Content analysis is a method for analyzing the content of a variety of data, such as visual and verbal data. It enables the reduction of phenomena or events into defined categories so as to better analyze and interpret them" (Harwood and Garry, 2003). In recent years, researchers have used content analysis for systematic review of literature in order to identify publication trends. This research was conducted by using data from research articles and publications. Literature was searched by using keywords of "Environmental Philosophy", "Ethics", "Natural Hazards", "Human Beings", and "Environmental Ethics in Buddhism".

Millions of years back before the presence of *Homo sapiens* on the Earth the natural system governed our planet. Landslides, earthquakes, flooding etc. were just geophysical events which threatened the survival of flora and fauna. With the presence of the mankind the governing power of the planet was transformed gradually to the humans. Some activities of the humans disturbed the flow of the natural system and that cause to transfer the geophysical events into natural disasters. According to Alca'ntara-Ayala (2002) natural disasters are threatening events, capable of producing damage to the physical and social space where they take place not only at the moment of their occurrence, but on a long-term basis due to their associated consequences. When these consequences have a major impact on society and/or infrastructure, they become natural disasters.

Sri Lanka being a small island in the Indian Ocean in the path of two monsoons is mostly affected by weather related hazards (Ministry of Disaster Management, 2017). The most frequent natural hazards that affect Sri Lanka are droughts, floods, landslides, cyclones, vector borne epidemics (malaria and dengue), and coastal erosion (Zubair, Ralapanawe, Tennakoon, Yahiya, & Perera, 2002 ascited evidence from Tissera

1997).Tsunamis are infrequent but have caused severe damage. Drought is a result of extreme negative rainfall anomalies. (Disaster Management Center - Ministry of Disaster Management, 2017)The prevalence of drought may be surprising given that Sri Lanka receives an average of 1,800 mm of rainfall annually. As per the disaster profile of Minister of Disaster Management (2017), 6,396,361 individuals were affected from natural disasters during the period of 1994-2004 where floods and droughts caused the severe damages.

When looking deeply into the reasons behind these disasters of diverse nature, it is apparent that human activities play a major role. It is true that since the emergence of mankind, environment has been used to satisfy human needs but in varying degrees of modifications to the environment itself. Today we observe that the level of modifications done to the environment is massive where the world as a whole experiences the consequences of it. Thus, compared to past, we witness that there is a significant increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters and accompanying loss of human lives and properties recently. Mankind has become so anthropocentric where they have forgotten their moral obligations towards natural environment and count non-human world purely as a means to human ends.

Buddhism is deeply ecological where the interdependence and interconnectedness of nature's elements are emphasized. There are many preachings by the Buddha on how natural environment should be perceived, valued and protected. According to Warapitiye Mangala (1999) as cited by Vidurupola Piyatissa (1939) the Buddha has preached if a person breaks even a branch of a tree which has given him shelter, he is considered as an ungrateful individual.

"Yassarukkassachāyāya- Nisīdeyyasayeyyava

Tassasākhaṃbhanjeyya- Mitta doho hi pāpako"

Buddhist philosophy provides a sound platform for moral obligations to the environment in the form of environmental ethics. According to De Silva (1998), the Buddhist perspective on environmentalism is emerged in relation to doctrines of non-self and of Four Noble Truths within the background of causal order of universe. Most of the natural disasters humans witness today reflect this causal nature

where mankind suffers effects for their own deeds. Floods due to heavy urbanization and improper land developments, landslides resulting from improper cultivation practices and constructions without proper environmental feasibility analysis, severe droughts due to continuous deforestations can be cited as few among many such instances.

Even though there are many policies and protocols agreed upon in national and international level to tackle the man-made causes of natural disasters, still we experience the hazardous consequences even severe. It is the high time to question whether regulations alone would be effective to handle this critical issue. This will continue till man becomes ungrateful to the Mother Nature, till he changes his attitudes, values and behaviors to minimize the harm done to the nature and till he learns to fulfill his morale obligations to the nature.

Keywords: natural disasters, environmental ethics, Buddhist philosophy

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