

# SUSTAINABLE EARTH FOR SUSTAINABLE HUMANITY: BUDDHONOMICS APPROACH

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by Chandan Kumar\*

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## ABSTRACT

Largest wildfire and tornadoes in America, chilling cold waves in Europe, empty monsoon clouds in Himalayan ranges, intense cyclone in the Indian Ocean makes 2018, worst year in the history of mankind. Climate change, Global warming is not fictional but real. Scientific data, observations and changing weather pattern suggests that earth temperature is rising to alarming level. The Greenhouse effect is the main cause of the global warming. Human activities over last Fifty years is the main cause of the Greenhouse effect.

We, the citizen of the globalised World are the first and the last generation who are facing and who are in decisive role to control the biggest problem of human civilisation i.e Climate change. In the name of development, we ruined our past and destroying our future by consuming natural resources blindly, what our forefathers preserved for us. Human civilization is in verge of collapse due to changing climatic atmosphere of the planet earth.

This paper focuses on the Buddha's teaching on environment and human sustainable development. Living and nonliving being, all are interrelated, dependent on each other's, that's why we coexist. Today human becoming self-centred, inclusive growth overtaken by materialistic and exclusive pursuit of wealth.

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This paper is divided into two parts, first part deals with problem of climate change. Why and how Industrial revolution and globalisation impact more on Climate Change. How humans destroying earth and future of human race.

In the second part on the findings of its solutions of the path of Buddha's teachings of economy and sustainability i.e. Buddhonomics (Buddhist Economics). Buddhonomics is ethical solution of climate change, by minimising desire, eliminating poverty and maximising sustainability to all.

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*'Whatever living creatures there may be,  
Without exception, weak or strong,  
Long, huge or middle-sized,  
Or short, minute or bulky.  
Whether visible or invisible,  
And those living far or near,  
The born and those seeking birth,  
May all beings be happy!'*

Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta, 146-147

Buddhist believe that Individual, environment and ecology, all are interconnected and interdependent with each other (mind, body, flora and fauna). Buddha was born in a forest, got enlightened under *Bodhi* tree and died (*Mahaparinirvana*) under a pair of Sal tree. Forest or trees is symbolic to human Civilization to understand the importance of nature in Buddhism and for the Buddhist. The World is full sorrow, everywhere is *Dukkha*, Buddhist goal is to achieve Nirvana and cessation of *Dukkha* through Noble eightfold path and promote compassion, love and tolerance for all living and non living. Buddha's teaching always gives importance to path of self realisation. The Vihara institutions or *Sangha* follow, *Patimokkh* set of rules, that prohibits damage of vegetation, "*Vasāvasa*" or traveling was prohibit during raining season to protect newly growing vegetation. Vegetation are called as "*Eka indriya jīva*" one sense faculty (*Patimokkha*, Vinay Pitaka Vol-3,155). Buddhist *Vinaya* rules enacted with environment protection and prohibit

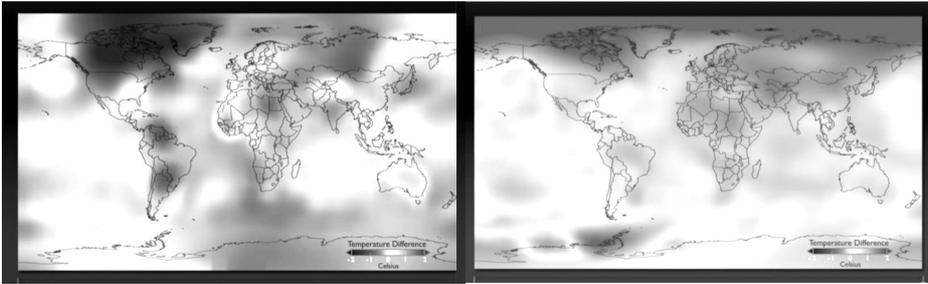
killing of living beings, cutting of trees or branches, digging or polluting river or reservoirs. Buddha's teaching of helpfulness of nature and protection of environment is very important for ecology as well as sustainability of human Civilization.

Environment is our surroundings that effects our life, for example air, water, plants and animals etc. In a simple way, where we lived, do work, we build our own environment, academic environment, intellectual environment, agriculture environment. We build our healthy environment by good *karma*, but any one can destroy it by bad *karma* (*Karma* (Sanskrit), *Kamma* (Pali) is righteous action). An study of various scientists confirmed that, in last hundred years, people destroying environment in a big way, as a result of industrial revolution and advancement of new technology leads to mass production of commercial vehicle, that consuming very large quantity of natural, non renewable energy. These vehicle producing carbon dioxide in large scale into atmosphere causing air pollution and noise pollution as well. Many environment or many biotic and non biotic exist within an ecological system.

Human Civilization interconnected and interdependent with environment and ecology emotionally. But in last hundred years, after the great industrial revolution, in the name of development, we ruined our past and destroying our future by consuming natural resources blindly, what our forefathers preserved for us. Human civilization is in verge of collapse due to changing climatic atmosphere of the planet earth. World Temperature maintained data was recorded in 1884, Now look at the two picture given below<sup>1</sup>.

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1. Picture no-1/2, curtesy; E.O Wilson Biodiversity Foundation project "Life on Earth" page no 14.



Picture no 1

#Earth Temperature in 1884

Dark Yellow referred to warmer places.

Picture no 2,

#Earth Temperature in 2010

Dark yellow covered the whole earth and sharply to Red. \*Red is higher temperature

In 1992, great effort started by The United Nations (UN) under the topic of “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. More than 179 countries representatives participated. The World Community declared and signed five documents which relate officially to Sustainable Development for the first time as follows: as mentioned in United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, (1992) “Chapters and Agreements,” United Nations, New York. ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org))

*“Environment issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment “including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided”.*

After Twenty Five years of Rio “Earth Summit”, we now understand that Climate Change, Global Warming is very serious threat to human Civilization. Due to increasing carbon emissions to the atmosphere, earth temperature is rising towards alarming rate. In the last hundred years earth temperature raised to three degree Celsius. Due to rise in temperature glaciers are melting that leads to rise in the ocean level. It’s is said that increasing rate of the earth temperature can raises to six degree Celsius by the year 2100. That

threat can lead to extinction of human race from the planet earth. That also proven by environmentalists and scientists that climate change cannot be stop but we can only sustain and minimise by taking numerous steps. Climate change and global warming is “*Global Dukkha*” of human race. *Dukkha* is suffering, at individual level and climate change is *Dukkha* at global level, for all.

## 1. BUDDHIST ENVIRONMENTALISM

Buddhist environmentalism is modern phenomenon, the modern interpretation of Buddha teachings on environmental concern called as buddhist ethics or deep ecology. Love and compassion towards everything including plants and trees, because everyone is govern by cycle of rebirth, in the form of living things or in the form of plants and trees. Various *Jataka* (Jataka is Buddha’s previous birth 547 stories) these stories giving information about the Buddha previous birth in different forms. Jataka stories centric towards individual karma that’s leads to cycle of rebirth. Buddha always gives emphasis on self realisation of truth, truth is nirvana, wisdom. Buddha on living things;

*Apā dakehi me mettam. mettam. dipā dakehi me*

*Catuppadehi me mettam. mettam. bahuppadehi me*

*Mā mam. apā dako him. si mā mam. him. si dipā dako*

“Let me have universal love for the footless; and for those with two feet; let me have universal love for those with four feet; and for those with many feet. Let not the footless harm me; nor those with two feet; let not the four-footed harm me; nor those with many feet” (Anguttar Nikaya Vol 3, Verse 72, Trans. Richard Morris and E. Hardy (eds). 6 Vols, London: PTS, 1885–1910; translated by F. L. Woodard and E. M. Hare as The Book of Gradual Sayings. 5 Vols, London: PTS, 1932–6.)

In a symbolic way Buddha indicating love and compassion toward, footless living things. Let self be not ignorant by ignorance of non understand other living creature and environment.

The most important aim of buddhism is to discrete individual “Self”. Desire of attachment to “self” is the root cause of suffering i.e *Dukkha*. Ignorance (*Avidhaya*) of understanding “self” and

attachment towards materialistic world is the root cause of climate change and global warming. Self desire create needs, needs is very essential for survival, but if needs became luxury then that is *Dukkha*. The whole problem of climate change is due to our individualist “desire of more”. Desire of more leads to blindly use of natural resources for large scale production.

Buddhism has seen no need to develop a special and separate position on nature and ecology. And indeed we might as well be justified in concluding that in fact Buddhism has no particular environmental ethic at all. By the same token, however, we would have to conclude also that Buddhism is an environmental ethic, in that it cannot be put into practice without completely transforming one’s every response to nature and the environment ( Paul Waldau, “Buddhism and Animal Rights,” in Damien Keown (ed.) *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000, pp 99.)

Buddha always gives emphasis on self practical knowledge.

- Our human Civilization is developing, there are many problems the World is facing today, eliminate poverty, illiteracy, unemployment etc.
- There no going to be Eureka to combat Climate change. We have to do on individual level.

## 2. WE ARE PART OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE: DIRECT IMPACT

Buddhist virtue of environment conservatism is very old, at the time of Buddha there were many rules laid down for Buddhist Vihara life. Monarchistic *Thera’s* sought out Nature as much because they were poets and children of Nature as because they were *arahants*. They present a unique blend of religious maturity, primeval shyness, and aesthetic sensitiveness. And very probably, given an efficient state of organisation in the Order, to such exceptionally gifted men exceptional leisure was accorded as a necessity for their proper development, and not in any way a concession to ethical slackness or pagan and atavistic instincts (Anguttar Nikaya Vol 1, Verse 2, Trans. Richard Morris and E. Hardy (eds). 6 Vols, London: PTS, 1885–1910; translated by F. L. Woodard and E. M. Hare as *The Book*

of Gradual Sayings. 5 Vols, London: PTS, 1932–6.) Relationship with nature was primarily objective of monks, because vihara was constructed in the forest, for example *Jetavana Mahavihara*. This was only individual level effort to protect environment.

Now today a larger population today using mobile phones, we have to recharge battery every day, now understand how, at the individual level, we are contributing or destroying our climate.

- *When ever we write a SMS on mobile “Hi” we are destroying our climate .Because a larger percentage of electricity is generated by the fossil fuels, that generates enormous amount of carbon into atmosphere.*

- *Our outer atmosphere is stuck with green house gases that leads to rise in atmospheric temperature.*

- *That is also called individual “Carbon Foot Print”. If two billion mobile holding population write “Hi” i.e two billion carbon foot prints. And that realising a very large amount of green house gases in the earth atmosphere.*

- *Evernote our food waste realise methane gas.*

- *Lots of pollution in the world today , due to releasing carbon footprint that leads to natural disasters and climate change.*

- *That why, now we experience different climate patterns across globe.*

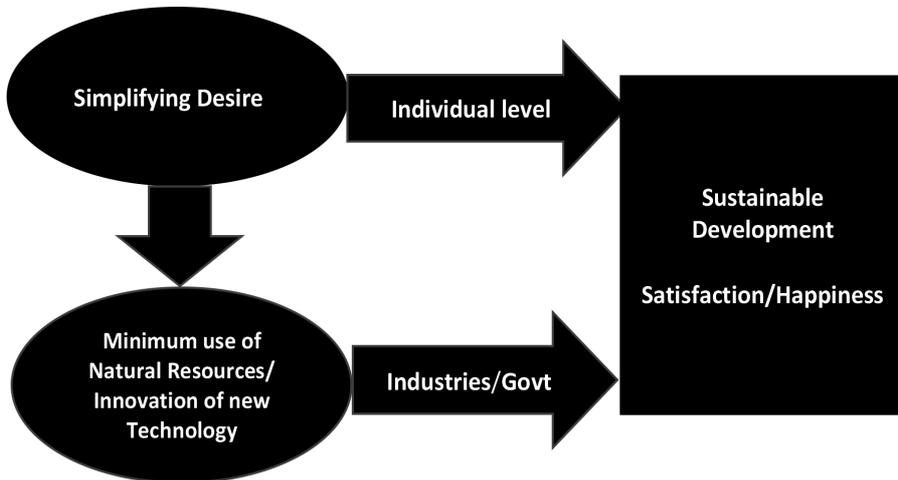
By the example of mobile phone, greenhouse gases emissions, now we understand that how an individual contributing or enhancing climate change. This is one example of technology driven emission, when we closely observe the modern needs of individual, there are many more that release green house gases. This is for self understanding or according to Buddhism self realisation of bad *karma*. J. Krishnamurti, an environmentalist said on nature that, “ What relationship have we, you and I, to that crisis and how shall we act? . . . we have to assume the responsibility for our own action, that is, we have to understand our own nature, we have to understand ourselves”.

It’s our responsibility, it’s our karma that define everything, our home, our family, our environment, our ecology and our planet. Dependent Origination also states that the chakra of life and death

can be eliminated, only by understanding the cause. That can only be understood by knowledge.

### 3. UNDERSTANDING BUDDHONOMICS

Buddhonomics is a combination of two words, Buddhist and economics, Buddha's principle on economics. Buddhonomics is a sustainable way of life, that is simplifying self desire. We now understand that our own self desire is creating an obstacle in minimising climate change and achieving sustainability of the human race. Buddha always gives emphasis on understanding self, if we want change, first we have to change ourselves through self knowledge. Buddhist principle of **Dependent Origination**, *We did that, now also we are doing that*, that's why Climate Changing. Our own desire of materialist luxury is the root cause of climate change. Buddhonomics is a blanching economy and ecology "*Middle Path*" for sustainable development and reduce carbon emissions. In other words Sustainability through simplifying or minimising self desire for getting maximum satisfaction i.e happiness. In 2001 Bhutan adopted a principle of measuring country growth not by Gross Domestic Product but by Gross National Happiness.



Today, the market driven free economy, individual is treated as commodities, every one is ignorant in creating wealth. Income, extra income can give happiness but temporary, extra income or extra wealth leads to mental problem to individual level and consumption of natural resources leads to bigger problem at global level.

If the world is facing serious disaster of climate change, then how this blindly created wealth will help. This ignorance is the biggest hurdle in combating climate change. Buddhonomics is understanding market driven ignorance of boom and burst economy of Twenty first century.

#### 4. THE SOLUTION

Blooming of flowers, reaping of fruits in the kitchen garden gives us inner satisfaction and happiness. We are emotionally attached to our environment and our ecology. Increasing population is also threatening us because there is limitation of sustainability on earth.

- The Buddhonomics implies that the role of business is to produce goods and services for the well-being of the individual and the society, in need basis but also to act as a instrument or way for sustainable development along the path towards overcoming self greed..
- Individualistic competition is dangerous, we have to develop tendencies towards mutual cooperation, understanding, business can foster development of knowledge, creating new technology.
- Natural resources are limited, we all ready crossed maximum limit. Most important and essential is the source of resources used in producing goods should be sustainable and renewable and establish sustainable industries.

Solution to combat climate change and global warming is balancing economy and ecology “*Middle Path*” of Buddhonomics. Making bond with nature and universe is our responsibility to a prospers earth. Righteous action is important, that action become international action and for the beneficial of the society and the mankind. Karma, Self action is inspiration for the others also.

That is only through individual action:

##### Individual level:

- i. Example of carbon foot print emitted by a single individual given above is to understand the emissions rate by billions of people

in a single day. Buddha teachings says that no one can give nirvana to others, it only the person who can achieve the stage of nirvana by him or herself by individual practice. If a person overcome the ignorance i.e understand, his or her contribution in destroying climate that lead to climate change impact by good *karma*.

Buddha's teaching about the individual action is self *Kamma* (*Karma*). He said that;

*"Monks, I say intentional action is kamma. Having intended, kamma is done by body, by speech, by thought ( Anguttar Nikaya, Vol-3, Verse-415).*

ii. Desire is the root cause of suffering, it create materialistic affection towards non essential, unnecessary things. Suppose in a family of four people having small car, that is comfortable for all, big television set, but because of desire family want big car and bigger television. This is completely ignorance, for big car and bigger television family member do hard work but that lead to extra consumption of fossil fuel and more electricity, that leads to more carbon emissions and also mental suffering. To combat climate change, desire should be simplify, not make necessity to luxury. Minimising desire will give inner satisfaction and happiness.

Buddhonomics is an individual approach towards reducing greenhouse gases at micro level. Micro or individual level can leads to change the present narrative of climate change problem.

Understand first (self knowledge) Give the way to others

Use less

Experience more

First, by understanding climate change impact is very important, then help others to understand, this will make a chain reaction of understanding, eliminating ignorance. We all are interconnected and interdependent on each other, in last hundred years we blindly used natural resources now it's our turn to return, protect and preserve our environment.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Year 2030 is very crucial for human Civilization, it's said that the earth temperature will rise to alarming stage by 2030, that will

cause deep ecological and environmental problem. That what we are stated witnessing, rise in temperature in Europe, rise in cyclonic activities in the ocean, melting of glaciers in Arctic, flood, famine etc.

In 2001 United Nation adopted “United Nation Millennium Goals, the goals that should be achieved by all parties by 2015. But unfortunately all the parties were not able to achieved that goals. It’s was not achieved because of the emission limitations controversies. Now once gain in Paris, France, Conference of parties, United Nation agreed to achieve Sustainable Development goals by 2030. The Sustainable Development goals also includes agreement on reducing carbon emissions and also reducing or sustaining earth temperature by 2030. These are the steps what governments and responsible organisations are doing to combat climate change and global warming.

But most important role can play in this scenario is individual efforts. In that, understanding climate change impact, implementing on self and helping others to follow is the best way. Understanding is very important, most of the people did not understand or didn’t want to understand or most of the people think that this is government responsibility. That is called ignorance, climate change directly and indirectly effecting every individual on this planet. Therefore it our duty to combat climate through self motivation. First understand, then help others to understand and eliminate the cycle of ignorance. Now it’s our responsibility to protect, conserve and give back to nature and give a better planet to our future generations.

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## Important Websites

1. UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change website <http://www.ipcc.ch>
2. Climate Change – US EPA website <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange>
3. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change <http://www.unfccc.int>
4. UN climate Change Programme – [www.un.org/climatechange](http://www.un.org/climatechange)