

Buddhist perspective and environmental conservation: A case study of "Vanaropa Sutta"

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Abstract

The teachings of Lord Buddha are more relevant today because the environmental problems are increasing day by day. Sri Lanka is facing a lot of environmental problems and deforestation is a particular concern because the forest cover in the island has considerably decreased. In 1920s, Sri Lanka had 49 percent forest cover but by 2017 it had reduced to 29.7 percent of the total land area. One of the national targets for sustainable development of Sri Lanka is to increase the forest cover to 32% by 2030. In such a context, this paper attempted to find out the Buddhist perspective on environmental conservation with special reference to "Vanaropa Sutta" which is the discourse on the merit gained in planting groves. This research was a library based exploratory research using existing secondary literature resources on Buddhism and environment. The Tripitaka is the most important scripture of Theravada Buddhist teachings. Therefore, the secondary data were collected from "Vanaropa Sutta" of "Samyutta Nikaya" in "Sutta Pitaka" and the comparative analysis was done focusing on the relationship between the religion and the environment. In "Vanaropa Sutta", Buddha pointed out that the merits are beneficial to engage in good deeds such as planting orchards and gardens, planting groves, building bridges, providing drinking water for travelers and shelter for public with regard to Dhamma. Study results revealed that Buddhism has framed moral guidelines and rules to conserve the environment and human well-being. The legal rules and regulations are not enough to protect the environment. The role of the religion is crucial as a social institution which helps to create social cohesion and social control for environmental conservation. In the Sri Lankan social context, more than 70% of Sri Lankans were Theravada Buddhists; hence, religious leaders can play a vital role to change the mind and attitudes on environmental conservation. The promotion of environmental friendly attitudes and behaviour is a timely needed approach in finding solutions for the crisis of deforestation in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Buddhist perspective, Deforestation, Merit, Social control, Social institution*

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