

# Lessening Environmental Challenges through Comparative Philosophical Approaches

RAJENDRA GHIMIRE

*Lumbini Buddhist University, International Centre, Lumbini, Nepal*

- 
- **Article History:** Submitted 16 February, 2025; Reviewed 22 March, 2025; Revised 1 April, 2025 • **Corresponding Author:** Rajendra Ghimire
  - **Email:** rajendra@lbu.edu.np
- 

## Abstract

*Contemporary ecological challenges and crises demand a systematic solution approach. Environmental perception and engagement vary at different levels, not only at the global level but also at local experiences backed up by historical, social, and individual contexts. The gaps between the global and local structures are primary challenges to address environmental issues. The Buddhist approach sketches out the systematic perspectives to consider these gaps through interconnectedness, mindfulness, and ethical responsibility. Buddhist principles such as dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) and non-duality can bridge the gap between global and local perspectives on environmental protection. Buddhism promotes an ethical framework that surpasses the multiple dimensions of structure by grounding global environmental action in the localized, mindful awareness of individual and holistic impact. Several approaches to address local to global level environmental issues prevail in the contemporary world. Among them, Buddhist Approaches to the environment incorporate compassion and wisdom, which can be an alternative to addressing rising global and local environmental challenges. Similarly, multiple dimensions associated with the Buddhist approach, from individual to global level, can address environmental challenges by acknowledging local identities to address global environmental challenges.*

**Keywords:** Ecology, environment, Buddhist Approach, Dependent Origination, Challenges, Ethical Responsibility

## **Introduction**

Environmental challenges are the major tension of every individual and state throughout the world. Different kinds of disbalances in environments like climate change, drought, global warming, CO<sub>2</sub> production, water and air pollution, loss of lives and habitats, ozone layer depletion, and changes in biodiversity are the major environmental challenges in the contemporary world. Environment or nature is perceived according to different contexts, when we see in the Muslim context nature is taken as the God (Kaushik et al. 273). Nature and environment are common units for all the components over it, all the components in nature are interconnected. Wholeness is the primary concept for nature (Wang and Tan 844). Rapid development in technology and its infrastructure for its development are also issues of concern.

Similarly, global environmental challenges are the major tension of the global bilateral and multilateral community. We can say that global environmental issues are the foremost issue to discuss in every campaign and forum. Global warming is as the people around the world are feeling the increasing temperature of the world and they are more tense about. Global environmental challenges are believed to be higher in developing states than in the developed states. As developing states are in the mode of developing different infrastructure, physical infrastructure tends to have more environmental resources and use of nature in high quantity, so the use of resources in underdeveloped countries is high and it is giving the sense of environmental challenges by which global community is feeling the environmental changes which are challenging.

Buddhist lens of world system particularly through the dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), highlights the interconnectedness and interdependence of every being and environmental order including ecosystem (Wang and Tan 844). It is believed that everything in the universe is connected to each other, and they cannot be taken in an isolation or separately so every human being and the entity of the universe must be in the proper place by which balances in connectedness and interrelations can be maintained. Similarly, a key approach for sustainable environment is the concept of non-harm (*ahiṃsā*), which highlights and encourages the communities and individuals to adopt the less harm to nature practice such as waste management, protecting natural resources and focusing on plant-based diet (McLeod 97).

Different perceptions of the environment by different communities and individuals may lead to challenges because they consider the environment in their own

understanding without considering its connectedness and consequences to the global level. Harmonizing global and local environmental challenges is very important in the contemporary world, Buddhist approaches dependent origination, non-duality, and individual-global level can be the alternatives to address the global to local challenges (Su Jungho 10).

## **Research Objective, Methodology and Limitation**

This study explores how environmental problems can be understood and addressed through the ideas of three major philosophies: Buddhism, Marxism, and Islam. It looks at how each of these traditions' views nature, the relationship between humans and the environment, and the moral duties people have toward protecting the earth. By studying important texts and teachings from these traditions, the research aims to find useful values and ethical guidelines that can help promote more responsible and sustainable ways of living. The goal is to offer a set of ideas that can support current efforts to deal with environmental issues from a moral and philosophical point of view.

The study is limited in its scope. It only focuses on Buddhist, Marxist, and Islamic philosophies, and does not include other important views like those from Christianity, Hinduism, or Indigenous traditions. The work is based on reading and analyzing texts, not on collecting new data or doing practical fieldwork. It tries to understand and compare the selected philosophies through their core ideas, not by looking at how they are applied in different countries or cultures. By keeping the focus narrow, the study allows for a deeper look at each philosophy while recognizing that many other perspectives also offer valuable insights on environmental issues.

## **Systemic and Global Approach to Environmental Challenges**

Different attempts to address the global environment challenges and issues there are many approaches by which it is believed to manage the environmental issues. Common Property theory is the theory where the Environment is considered as the mutual place for every being in nature so human beings must act very responsibly for the preservation and proper management of resources. Environmental issues and different natural phenomena are the matter to be considered by the humans in global to local levels. Local management structures, rooted in local knowledge of such environmental system, however, commonly provide rules of use that maintain subsistence and renewal of these community resources (Robbins 17).

It is true that the community is the primary and major unit by which the environment can be properly managed and policies from the local context are generated which are believed to be practical and easier to implement. Similarly, when community engages in the environment seriously by understanding the interconnectedness of the natural resources and elements that make sense for proper attempt to the systemic approach by the community to environmental challenges. When such concepts for the environment are failed to gain the objective, it leads to scarcity and different issues over the resources and create bad impact in the nature (18).

Common Property theory is considered as the most important tool to contemporary political ecology. The Marxist Political Economy is another approach for political ecology which is linked to environmental challenges. According to Marxist political economy different existing systems in society like social, cultural are the result of historical materials and status with the relations to real stuff (18). In comparison to the common property approach it focuses on capitalist concept, where state or the certain unit is major source for the use of nature and resources rather than small community. Similarly, Marxist political economy theory is based on the labor market rather than privatization of different units in society which centers the different set of policy in one unit. When one unit is considered as the implementing body for the policies it may create gaps in implementation and objectives. “Capitalism is a roaring engine that proliferates contradictions that must be solved either through ongoing rapacious growth or increasing exploitation of workers and the natural environment” (33).

Degradation of the environment is taken as the major weakness and environmental issue which leads to the different challenges in nature and lives. Historical materialism explains the mode of production due to different changes over time. There are diversities in the environment, and which are in their role, if anything gets wrong in the diversities there may be conflict of contradiction which creates different issues and challenges. Environmental status is the result of social and material elements, which make differences and changes in structures and perception of nature over time (36).

## **Comparative Analysis of the Environmental Approaches**

Beliefs and perception about the environment are different according to context, locality, societal values etc. When we see to the Islamic perspective to nature and

culture, Islamic community believe that God (Allah) is the creator of the nature including human. There is very interconnectedness in nature in its difference and humans are one of them. The differences in nature are dependent and interrelated more than compulsory (Manzoor 423). Perception over nature is dependent to the philosophy which they are focused on similarly language and culture as well play an important role how they are developed and transferred. When the Muslim perception on nature and environment is fully concerned with God (Quran), the study of nature and natural philosophy is also largely influenced by the Arabic language (Manzoor 426).

Buddhist monastic communities in Thailand and Sri Lanka have adopted the Buddhist approaches to forest management, water resources management, and sustainable agriculture portraying how Buddhist approaches can be practiced in environmental and ecological conservation initiatives (Darlington 37). Buddhist approaches to environment such as dependent origination, non-duality and bottom to top are proven as the resilient approach which covers and reflects the mutuality with other culture and religion as well. Through the perspective of less harm to nature from the interconnected of every being and environment it reflects that the approach of dependent of origination can give the way out for local to global level environmental challenges (Kaushik et al. 27).

Perception of the individual varies broadly and cannot be assumable easily. Perception towards the community varies as environmental challenges are the challenges for every collective unit, they have an impact and influence all over the community. Different concepts and perceptions about the environment and resources must be gathered from individual to community level where such issues about the environment can be addressed and give proper management.

“If people are to share their experiences they must talk about them, and to do that these experiences must be represented by means of concepts, which in turn may be expressed in words whose meanings are established within a community of speakers by verbal convention. Thus, collective representations serve as a kind of bridge between individual consciousnesses that are otherwise closed to each other, furnishing them with a means of mutual understanding.” (Ingold 57)

Environment as the core unit of the world and ecological psychology of the individual and different groups are the major concerns. We must consider the process of thinking, perceiving, and memorizing in terms of different environmental scenes and our interconnectedness with environment (59). Wholeness is the primary way to

perception about nature which makes the perception of environment as a whole and we are the small unit, we must act respectively. As human beings we must responsibly care about the wholeness. Wholeness is taken as the concept where a single individual is related to others i.e. all components are interrelated to each other and the principle of wholeness is completely practical to the human being, nature, and the environment (Ramose 99). The relations and interdependence between the components of nature is unavoidable and that must be conducted in a very careful manner. For the maintenance of this relations and interconnectedness human beings should care for the physical or natural world, and in the process of wholeness, there may be the danger of establishing its authority (101).

As nature is the combination of all components around us, which are totally connected to each other. “The anthropocentric viewpoint is that human beings are the central and most important entity in the world; that humans are superior to non-human life because they are the only ones that have consciousness values and moral status” (Sólon and Satgar 108). Nature is taken under control of the human, but it is totally than the human, human is only the unit of nature. In the contemporary context nature is something separate from humans, nature can be exploited for the benefits of human beings’ interests. “The Right of Mother Earth” builds an earth community, a society that has humans and nature, to flourish as the earth community, we must give equal treatment and respect to all who are the part of its glaciers to forests animals to humans and from plants to the wind and ultimately all beings (107). There is a very deep chain among the units in the earth which are very vague and hard to examine. Environmental changes throughout the earth are very complicated to understand, effects on the environments are interconnected and which are very difficult to understand and guess (McLeod 98).

The way humans behave to nature is developed through different circumstances like the evolution of human beings in the world. All the ideas for nature are the subject to be developed through religious ideas, philosophies, and moral codes which are developed throughout history. Earth is the center rather than human beings for the actual balance of the different challenges in the environment. The global environmental challenges and changes are not easy to understand in a simple way human caused effects on the earth are very complex, such issues are connected to one another in multiple manners 99).

“Right of Mother Earth movement has to address key concerns, including compliance, and implementation; payment for ecosystem services and the so-called

green economy: challenging property rights and going beyond the legal texts to address key issues such as what kind of earth democracy we want to create”. (Sólon and Satgar 107)

The growing concept of human rights throughout the world gives different rights to humans for the ownership of different rights in terms of property rights like rights over different resources. Rights over the land minerals, oil, animals’ water can be state owned, or public are always the property of humans but everything in nature can not be property because in order to become property it has to be isolated or subject to being brought to the market (107).

## **Reconciliation of Environmental Issues in Contexts**

Environmental challenges and issues are more common to every human being and to the other components of the environment. Global trends towards ecology and environment have seemed according to different national interests like the destruction of the environment can be bought and sold. In recent time ‘biodiversity offsets’ have become famous as they promote the preservation of the ecosystem in one place and destruction in another place by which the environment cannot be compensated (109).

The rapid advancement of technology and the development of the virtual world is also taken as the phenomena of environmental issues throughout the world. Similarly, the virtual world takes more resources than we can think about, we can easily use a laptop and enjoy it but we cannot easily understand how much resources are used to develop regulations. Simultaneous availability of people in the next platform is understood as the virtual world and the virtual world is understood as the second life as well (Bolstorff xiii). When the program gets started, we can easily start our second life by entering the username and password, the virtual platform owners of the second life limit the access of the people to enter leave or access the way, which is considered as primitive (xiii). Rapid use of virtual world is also the major issue for contemporary world it gets dependent to the high quantity of resources and at the same time it makes the separation and division of the people in real and physical life. Such separation may create different kinds of gap among the people. I feel getting the virtual world is fine, but it must be concise.

Human beings are the superior with consciousness and have the strength to act in nature respectively. Human beings must be the center of focus to maintain the ecological balance in a well and balanced manner. Solon mentions that “human activities have the potential to transform how the earth system operates in ways that



may prove irreversible and that may make this planet less hospitable to humans and other life” (Sólon and Satgar 107). It is very difficult to estimate the harm done by humans to the earth. Salon further adds that “the probability of a human-driven abrupt change in the Earth’s environment has yet to be quantified, but it is a possibility” (107).

## **Conclusion**

Different perceptions of the environment vary the attitude towards nature and the way people act. As human beings are the main conscious actors of the universe, they must carry the role responsible to maintain the global ecological system. In the environment every aspect is connected by which there is a high level of interdependency so every activity by the human carried concerning each environmental issue. High use of technology and the concept of rapid growing virtual world is also the major challenge for the environment. With the concept of wholeness environmental issues can be solved and minimized in the contemporary world where every individual must play the responsible role.

As the world in the race of different competition like economic, infrastructure development they certainly go by the side of environment so for every kind of developmental works environment must be concerned. As Islamic perspective stresses on the interconnectedness of the environmental components including human beings, the concept of interconnectedness is mutual on the approaches like Marxism, Islam and Buddhism. environmental and Buddhist approaches primarily, dependent origination, non-duality and middle path can be the prominent solution to address the contemporary and future challenges raising at local to global contexts. There is still hope for management of the harm in the environment by human. Therefore, different cultural, social, political, religious dimensions of human nature are the center for the perception of the environment, and they interpret it from different backgrounds, the interpretation vary according to context and make some kind of heterogeneous beliefs toward nature, such heterogeneity should be considered mutually to handle the global environmental issues.

## **Works Cited**

Arjoon, Surendra. et al. “Virtuousness and the Common Good as a Conceptual Framework for Harmonizing the Goals of the Individual, Organizations, and the Economy.” *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 147, no. 1, Nov. 2015, pp.



- 143–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2969-6>.
- Boellstorff, Tom. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Revised edition., Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. xiii–xiii, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400874101>. Accessed 27 December 2024.
- Darlington, Susan M. *The Ordination of a Tree: The Thai Buddhist Environmental Movement*. State University of New York Press, 2012.
- Fortun, Kim. “Environmental Information Systems as Appropriate Technology.” *Design Issues*, vol. 20, no. 3, July 2004, pp. 54–65. <https://doi.org/10.1162/0747936041423217>. Accessed 19 January 2025.
- Gotsis, George. “Buddhist Economics: Philosophical Premises and Environmental Policy Implications.” *Management, change, strategy and positive leadership*, 2023, pp. 101–25. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41245-5\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41245-5_6). Accessed 16 January 2024.
- Ingold, Tim. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill : Pbk*. Produced by Amazon, 2000.
- Kaushik, Anubha, et al. “Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability Approaches.” *Springer eBooks*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-0902-2>. Accessed 26 January 2025.
- Lin, Jing et al. “Environmental Justice Must Include the Rights of All Species to Life and Respect: Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Education.” *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, vol. 30, no. 1–2, Nov. 2020, pp. 93–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2020.1854827>. Accessed 24 December 2024.
- McLeod, Melvin. *The Best Buddhist Writing 2009*. Shambhala Publications, 2009.
- Robbins, Paul. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. John Wiley and Sons, 2011.
- Sirisena, Prabhath. “Theravada Buddhism in the Anthropocene: The Role of the Radical Virtuosi.” *Journal of Global Buddhism*, vol. 25, no. 1, June 2024, pp. 10–26. <https://doi.org/10.26034/lu.jgb.2024.3813>. Accessed 11 January 2024.
- Sólon, Pablo, and Vishwas Satgar. “The Rights of Mother Earth.” *Climate Crisis, The*, Wits University Press, 2018, pp. 107–30.

Suh, Jungho. “Buddhism-based Intentional Communities Becoming Ecovillages: A Case of Sisa Asoke in Thailand.” *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, vol. 6, no. 1, Jan. 2024, pp. 10–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/25166026231221034>. Accessed 28 December 2024.

Ura, Karma. *A Short Guide to Gross National Happiness Index*. 2012.

Vafeidis, Athanasios Thomas, et al. “Harmonizing the Development of Local Socioeconomic Scenarios: A Participatory Downscaling Approach Applied in Four European Case Studies.” *Sustainability*, vol. 16, no. 6, Mar. 2024, p. 2578. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16062578>. Accessed 19 December 2024.

Wang, Juan, and Joan Qionglin Tan. “Towards a Holistic Buddhist Eco-Ethics.” *Religions*, vol. 15, no. 7, July 2024, p. 844. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15070844>. Accessed 27 December 2024.

Wittman, Hannah, et al. “A Social–ecological Perspective on Harmonizing Food Security and Biodiversity Conservation.” *Regional Environmental Change*, vol. 17, no. 5, Sept. 2016, pp. 1291–301. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-016-1045-9>. Accessed 13 January 2025.

*Women and Work in South Asia: Rights and Innovations*. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.59212/9789845063869>. Accessed 20 December 2024.