

# The Buddhist Perspective on Environmental Architecture

Dhammaloka, Rev. Jambughapitiye

Department of Classical Languages, University of Peradeniya

[gahapitiyajambu@gmail.com](mailto:gahapitiyajambu@gmail.com)

Having stepped into a so-called era of globalization with advanced technology, scientific concepts, ergonomic tools and so on, we have become capable of overcoming lots of natural and social calamities in many ways but have also caused a plethora of universal crises today. Much of those crises have been the repercussion of modern approaches to development. New concepts known as sustainability and sustainable development, therefore, were introduced to the world few decades ago. Environmental protection is one of the four pillars of sustainable development, with environmentally sustainable architecture (ESA) as one aspect of it. ESA is a way to save the earth's green space, to make our home or workplace sustainable, with minimum impact on the environment. Thus, the goal of ESA is to work with the environment in harmony.

It is well-known that Buddhism has influenced on the development of art and architecture throughout Asia in particular. Observing thousands of remaining Buddhist constructions proves that they had a sound philosophy of architecture as well. This paper thus, attempts to examine the Buddhist perspective on ESA, with the help of both literary resources and pertinent archaeological resources, and to see into what extent we may apply it to architecture today.

The *Senāsana* *kkhandhakā* instructs us in building and reconstructing monasteries as a need but not as a facility. There, we also find rich ideas on sanitation, waste reduction and use of minimum natural resources etc. The manmade monasteries in ancient times were built in gardens and included *vihāra*, *adḍhayoga*, *hammiya* (type of monasteries with walls and upstairs) whereas, some kinds of monasteries were natural shelters like *guhā* (cavern) and *bila* (cave). Further, according to the commentaries like *Samantapāsādikā*, *Sumaṅgalavilāsini*, some monasteries were more complex with added features. Some canons instruct us to thatch roofs with natural materials, recycle building materials and conserve furniture. In fact, all monasteries were built focusing necessarily on the spiritual development of dwellers. Therefore, the construction methods described by the Buddha were based on the fundamental Buddhist concepts like *sīla* (moral), *appicchatā* (moderation), *santuḥhitā* (contentment), *subharatā* (easiness to support) etc. and more scientific plus qualitative methods based on

them. Moreover, sanitary methods have obviously been influenced by *sekhīyās* (manners). Further, the *Mañjuśrībhāṣītavāstuvīdyāśāstra*, a Buddhist text which describes well developed architectural methods guides us to construct monasteries in harmony with the environment. Such concerns in the *Vāstuvīdyāśāstra* highlight the need of environmental equilibrium. When it comes to the archaeological aspect, the remaining caves, tanks, gardens, landscapes etc. may prove that, every monastery was built in environmentally friendly ways in ancient times, for which we find instances in the Anuradhapura period. It means that they were conformed to the five principles of environmental architecture; (i) healthful interior environment, (ii) energy efficiency, (iii) ecologically benign materials, (iv) environmental form and (v) good design. Following the Buddhist tradition, modern architecture may also learn some good lessons on how environmentally sustainable constructions may help maintain, restore and improve the mental health and wellbeing of humans who utilize them. Although all quantitative goals today may not be achieved with Buddhist perspective on ESA, it is quality that it supports, instructs on and helps us achieve.

**Key words:** Green Architecture, Environmental Equilibrium, Buddhist Monasteries, *Senāsanakkhandhak*,; Substantial Development, Environmentally Sustainable Architecture.