

FOREST AND ENVIRONMENT - THE BUDDHIST PERCEPTION

S J Wijsekera

Department of Geology, University of Peradeniya
Peradeniya

When man, tired by his ceaseless efforts to exert his mastery over his environment becomes disillusioned, he gradually seeks solace in his own inner consciousness. Discussed in this paper are the Buddhist views on the environment that enlightens and guides one who has shunned the more materialistic world and one who has sought a path of reality and truth.

When the Buddha attained enlightenment, his first task was to express his deep gratitude to the very tree which offered him shelter for a whole week. Through this exercise he taught the world to be grateful to the environment from which all our bioenergies are freely extracted. Subsequently for a period of forty five long years the enlightened one trekked the forests, crossed the free flowing streams, befriended the animals and spent his valuable life in very close harmony with the environment. He thus chose the forest, that supreme symbol of nature, as the base from which he could deliver the Dhamma to the world.

In this great effort to spread the Dhamma, is embedded unequivocally the sheer beauty, the majestic silence and the magnificence of the forest as clearly illustrated in the Buddhist literature.

In this paper is also discussed the discourses of the Buddha which presents His concepts of the environmental system. These are clearly depicted in the *Vinaya* and the *Sutta pitakas*. As a sequel, the benefits obtained by his disciples from the forest during their deeper understanding of the Dhamma sermons of the Buddha as vividly portrayed in the texts *Thera Gatha* and *Theri Gatha* are also briefly discussed.