

Contentment As A Buddhist Principle For Ecological Harmony

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Abstract

This study examines knowledge as a form of moderation practice, thereby helping to limit the over-exploitation of resources. Based on the Buddhist concept of *santuṭṭhi* (contentment), the article analyzes the role of knowledge in fostering psychological stability and at the same time forming a sense of awareness towards the environment. On the basis of a simple and adequate lifestyle, the article gives some examples of sustainable ways of living rooted in the spirit of knowledge. Thereby, the study shows that knowledge can be seen as a practical ethical foundation towards ecological harmony in the current social context.

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I. Introduction

In the context of the growing environmental crisis, development models based on unlimited consumption and exploitation are revealing serious limitations. In the face of this situation, many studies have sought ethical and lifestyle foundations that can regulate human behavior towards nature. In the Buddhist tradition, *santuṭṭhi* is seen not only as a psychological quality but also as a practical principle towards living a life of moderation and simplicity. This paper approaches knowledge as a moral resource that can contribute to the formation of ecological consciousness and sustainable lifestyles, thereby opening up an applied Buddhist approach to the issue of ecological harmony in contemporary society.

II. Definition Of *Santuṭṭhi* (Contentment)

Santuṭṭhi = *saṃ* + *tuṭṭhi*

Pāli: *Santuṭṭhi*, (f.) satisfaction, contentment. *Sam*: happily

Tuṭṭhi = *tu* + *ṭṭhi*, *ṭṭhi* from *ṭhitatta*: the fact of standing, self-controlled. ¹

Sanskrit: परितुष्टि *pari-tuṣṭi* (f.) complete satisfaction, contentment, delight.

In Buddhist thought, *santuṭṭhi* means being content or knowing when enough is enough. It is an important psychological and ethical quality that helps people maintain moral stability and supports spiritual practice. The term combines *saṃ*, meaning fullness or completeness, with *tuṭṭhi*, which conveys satisfaction and inner steadiness. The word is also associated with the meaning of stability and inner self-control. According to A. P. Buddhadatta's Concise Pāli-English Dictionary, *santuṭṭhi* does not simply mean satisfaction. It also refers to the state of inner calm built on self-control and self-sufficiency. The Sanskrit equivalent is *pari-tuṣṭi*, which also expresses the meaning of complete contentment and satisfaction.

Wisdom is emphasized many times in Buddhist scriptures as a typical feature of religious life. In the *Samaññaphala Sutta*², which discusses the path of practice towards enlightenment, knowledge is considered an important element of the disciplined life. This is especially concerned with how to use material needs in moderation. Similarly, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* emphasizes that monastics need to reduce their desires and practice self-sufficiency. As a result, the purity and stability of the Sangha life are maintained. When viewed from an ecological perspective, *santuṭṭhi* is more than just a personal virtue. That encourages more environmentally friendly ways of living as an ethical attitude.

III. Contentment And The Spirit Of Buddhist Sufficiency

In early Buddhism, *santuṭṭhi* (knowledge) was not just a personal psychological virtue. It is also a core moral principle that shapes the entire Buddhist way of life. The Buddha placed particular emphasis on knowledge in monastic life, especially through relying on the four basic necessities (*catu paccaya*): food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. In sutras such as the *Santuṭṭhi Sutta*³ and the *Sulabha Sutta*,⁴ these needs are described as “simple, easy to obtain, and unrepensible.” This shows that they are enough to sustain life and practice without burdening society. At the same time, their use does not cause ethical problems in the process of finding or using them.

It is important that the teachings on wisdom for monks are not intended to establish an ascetic lifestyle separate from society. The aim is to form the Sangha as a living moral model for the community. Through behavior and teachings, the spiritual life of the monastic becomes an example for lay people to learn the values of a simple life, know enough, and use material resources responsibly. In this sense, knowledge is both the foundation for the path of liberation and the moral principle that can be transformed into social life. From there, it contributes to orienting a lifestyle in harmony with the environment.

IV. Contentment In Food

With regard to food, *santuṭṭhi* appears clearly in the practice of alms-seeking (*piṇḍapāta*) and in the attitude of being content with simple nourishment. In the *Santuṭṭhi Sutta*, the alms meal is counted among the four basic requisites, making clear that food serves only to support the body for practice, not to provide enjoyment. A similar idea appears in the *Mahā Sakul'udāyi Sutta*⁵, where the Buddha's disciples are praised for eating in moderation and for not depending on sensual enjoyment.

Closely connected with alms practice is the use of the alms bowl (*patta*) in accordance with Vinaya regulations, which reflects the ethical dimension of contentment in the life of the *Saṅgha*. According to monastic discipline, when a monk receives a new bowl through donation, the old one, if still usable, should not be discarded. Instead, it is given to a junior monk or returned to the *Saṅgha* for redistribution. Only bowls that can no longer be repaired or used are thrown away. This rule shows that material items are valued according to practical need and usefulness rather than personal ownership.

From an ecological point of view, contentment in eating and in the use of utensils expresses an ethic of moderation, waste reduction, and reuse. When food is taken only in sufficient quantity, and objects are used as long as they remain functional before being redistributed rather than discarded, both resource consumption and waste production decrease. In this way, contentment in relation to food is not merely a matter of personal discipline, but also an ethical principle with wider ecological significance.

V. Contentment In Clothing

The garment aspect represents one of the most obvious manifestations of *santuṭṭhi* through the practice of wearing *paṃsukūla cīvara* along with the provisions of the *Vinaya* on the renunciation of the residual robe (*nissaggiya*). Algae chalk robes are made from discarded pieces of fabric, collected from landfills, graveyards, or public places. Then they are washed, patched up, and sewn into clothes. The *Santuṭṭhi Sutta* described these robes as “simple, easy to obtain and unrepensible”. This emphasizes that monks should not be looking for new, beautiful, or luxurious clothes, but need to know enough about what society has left behind.

In addition, the *Vinaya* stipulates that surplus or stored garments beyond the permissible period of time must be formally discarded, repented, and redistributed in the *Saṅgha*. They should not be kept for personal use or thrown away without reason. Through this practice, contentment is lived out in daily monastic discipline rather than remaining only an inner state. It is also reflected in specific disciplinary rules to limit accumulation, prevent waste, and encourage reuse. When viewed from the perspective of modern sustainable development, the use of algae pollen medicine and disposal practices can be seen as early forms of reuse and redistribution. Discarded materials are recycled, and items that are still usable are transferred to others instead of being thrown away. As a result, the demand for new production decreases, the exploitation of resources is limited, and the amount of waste is also reduced. This spirit is transmitted from monastic life to the lay community; it provides the moral foundation for sustainable forms of consumption, such as reuse, repair, and limiting the trend of consumption that follows fashion or excess.

VI. Contentment In Dwelling

In terms of accommodation, the spirit of knowledge is expressed in satisfaction with simple accommodations. For example, living under a tree or in simple arms and cups, as described in the *Santuṭṭhi Sutta* and in the teachings on the four noble lineages, *Ariya-vamsa Sutta*⁶. This principle of “residing in self-sufficiency” helps to limit over-construction, land grabbing, and environmental disturbances. When happiness is no longer equated with luxury housing, the pressure on forests, land, and building resources decreases accordingly. Taken together, contentment in food, clothing, and shelter reflects a consistent Buddhist ethic that encourages reuse and discourages waste. This attitude appears throughout both the suttas and the *Vinaya*. From consuming alms with the bowl used to its full potential, to putting on algae robes and discarding excess clothing, Buddhism offers a model in which material items are seen as the means of religious life. They are not things to be consumed and then replaced constantly, but need to be used to the maximum and shared in the community.

VII. Conclusion

It should be emphasized that this model of knowledge is not limited to monastic life. In Buddhist precepts, the regulations regarding eating, dressing and lodging reflect an ethic of moderation and sufficiency.

Through the role of education and exemplary role of the Sangha, these values are communicated to laypeople and gradually spread to the whole society. Theoretically, this suggests that Buddhism provides a consistent foundation for ecological ethics, when it comes to encouraging moderation, a sense of "knowing enough", resource reuse, and a shared sense of responsibility. In that way, ecological harmony begins with a transformation in the way people relate to basic material needs.

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