



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Ethical Principles In Buddhism

1Gurupriya Pavan, 2Prof. Anant Kumar Yadav

1Research Scholar, 2Professor

1Dr B.R. Ambedkar University Agra,

2Dr B.R. Ambedkar University(Institute Of Oriental Philosophy) Agra

Science and technology have completely transformed human life. Compared to earlier times, material comforts have increased manifold. However, alongside the rise in material comforts, human life values have also undergone change. Today, in this new environment, human beings are searching for new life values. Despite abundant material comforts, people are not finding true happiness and peace. Instead, they are experiencing stress and despair.

Religions across the world have provided different kinds of life values. Yet, science has invalidated many traditional religious beliefs through its discoveries. As a result, modern intellectuals are once again searching for the meaning of life, happiness, and peace. The principles of Buddhism are based on reason, rationality, and wisdom. The Buddha neither accepted the eternity of the soul nor the existence of a creator God. He also rejected the notion of heavenly pleasures in the afterlife. Instead of faith-based religious doctrines, the Buddha accepted a scientific outlook and sought to make life happy and meaningful accordingly.

Thus, it becomes essential to understand the human values inherent in Buddhism from the perspective of modern humanism. Since ancient times, Buddhism has attracted intellectuals due to its scientific orientation. This religion, free from imaginary beliefs, speaks of the welfare of all beings without discrimination. The Buddha emphasized that an individual creates their own future. No external power can bring happiness or peace to anyone. Neither God, nor scriptures, nor prophets can remove human suffering. This insight of the Buddha is supported by science and reason.

Today, elements like violence, hatred, superstition, and doubt are causing suffering to humanity. Religious rituals and ceremonies have also failed to remove human misery. Faith in ritualistic practices has declined, since performing them does not lead to happiness. On the contrary, religious orthodoxy has given rise to violence, crime, and wars. In this context, it is necessary to reflect on how adopting the scientific and humanistic teachings of the Buddha can bring peace and happiness.

The Buddha taught that humans themselves are the makers of their individual and collective destiny. According to him, compassion, loving-kindness, and morality—arising from wisdom—liberate a person from suffering. The ethical principles taught by the Buddha contribute significantly to the creation of a peaceful and prosperous society. In this paper, we wish to explore how the worldview presented by the Buddha can aid in the welfare of humanity. Are the human values propounded by the Buddha still useful and relevant today?

Within the Indian philosophical tradition, Buddhism is considered a non-theistic philosophy. It does not uphold the authority of the Vedas. According to the Buddha, ritualism, discriminatory social structures, and faith in God are contrary to the Dhamma. Hence, the Buddha presented a human-centered worldview, where humans are at the center of philosophy. Problems of human existence must be solved by human effort alone, without reliance on any supernatural power or deity.

To address suffering, the Buddha propounded the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths explain the reality of existence. According to the Buddha, life is characterized by suffering, but suffering can be overcome. For this purpose, he discovered the Eightfold Path. Thus, we may say that the Buddha's Dhamma is the path of the cessation of suffering. For the Buddha, the very essence of Dhamma lies in the eradication of suffering.

To achieve this, the Buddha made the doctrine of karma the foundation of his philosophy. While rejecting the eternity of the soul, he nevertheless accepted the doctrines of karma and rebirth. He also denied the existence of God. When there is no God, how can one expect God to remove suffering? According to the Buddha, a person experiences happiness or suffering based on their own actions. Wholesome deeds increase happiness, while unwholesome deeds bring suffering. No supernatural force or God can free an individual from suffering. This outlook is entirely scientific and human-centered.

Therefore, when the modern world speaks of humanism, the Buddha's path becomes central to the discussion. The Buddha spread his Dhamma without invoking any God or miracle. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar remarks: "In the modern age, if an individual who values reason, logic, and science has to embrace a religion, then it can only be the Dhamma of the Buddha." (1) The ultimate goal of the Buddha's teaching is to free humanity from suffering—that is, to ensure human welfare. The Basis of Ethical Life in Buddhism

In Buddhism, the foundation of morality is the doctrine of karma. A person is freed from the bondage of suffering only through their actions. The Buddha did not accept the existence of an eternal soul, nor did he accept the authority of a creator God. According to him, it is one's own actions that bring happiness or suffering. In Vedic tradition and Jainism, it is believed that the deeds of previous lives bear fruit in the present life. However, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar writes: "The Buddha's doctrine of karma relates only to actions of this very life." (2) This means that the results of past-life deeds, whether wholesome or unwholesome, do not bear fruit in the present birth. If one were to believe otherwise, all human effort would become meaningless. One would then assume that they are merely enduring the consequences of past deeds, and that nothing can change this. Such an outlook would render social reform futile. Moreover, this belief would perpetuate discrimination and inequality, since every circumstance could be explained away as the result of previous birth's karma. Dr. Ambedkar observes: "The Tathāgata Buddha, who is called the Ocean of Compassion and the Noble Friend, always opposed such doctrines." (3) Thus, we see that the philosophy of the Buddha aligns with science and reason, accepting only those traditions or beliefs that stand the test of rationality and wisdom.

From the Buddha's perspective, the world is full of suffering, but complete liberation from suffering is possible. He declared that his Dhamma is the path leading to the cessation of suffering. According to him, the world operates on the principle of cause and effect. The Buddha said that he had discovered the cause of suffering and also the way to eliminate it. By walking on this path, suffering can be overcome. Therefore, his philosophy is one of optimism. For the Buddha, ignorance (avidyā) gives rise to craving (tṛṣṇā) and hatred (dveṣa). If one wishes to be free from suffering, ignorance must be removed. Following the path shown by the Buddha dispels ignorance. When ignorance ceases, craving and hatred also disappear. This state of complete freedom from suffering is nirvāṇa. "This is the highest life. Nirvāṇa means liberation from attachment and hatred. The very purpose of life is nirvāṇa." (4)

The ethical principles of the Buddha are encompassed in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The first three steps of the Eightfold Path—right speech, right action, and right livelihood—form the moral foundation of Buddhism. "In the Buddhist view, morality is the first step on the path of truth (the Dhamma path), ultimately leading to concentration (samādhi) and wisdom (prajñā)." (5)

The Five Precepts, Eightfold Path, and Ten Wholesome Deeds:

Buddhism prescribes five precepts (pañca-sīla), or ethical rules, for everyone—both householders and monks. These are: not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to lie, and not to take intoxicants. These five moral rules are universal. (6) In addition, the Buddha taught the Eightfold Path. By following it, an individual not only frees themselves from suffering but also contributes to the welfare of society. Those who follow both the Five Precepts and the Eightfold Path embody all human virtues. Such a society rejects discrimination, fosters compassion, kindness, equality, and joy, and lives in harmony without violence or hatred.

It is important to note that the moral principles of the Buddha are not divine commandments. They are disciplines rooted in compassion and reason. The question may arise whether the Five Precepts are strict, unbreakable rules. In fact, in Buddhism, they are not rigid rules to be applied mechanically in all circumstances. Dr. Ambedkar notes: "Buddha's non-violence does not mean 'do not kill'; it means 'be friendly towards all beings.'" (7) If one cultivates friendship towards all living beings, the very thought of violence cannot arise.

Unlike Jainism, which insists on an absolute prohibition of violence in every circumstance, the Buddha did not make such inflexible rules. Here too, he advocated the Middle Path. He taught that to develop non-violence, one must cultivate a spirit of friendship toward all beings. Where there is true friendship, there can be no violence. Dr. Ambedkar explains: "The Buddha wanted to distinguish between 'the desire to kill' and 'the need to kill.' Where killing was necessary—for self-defense, family, or the protection of the nation—he did not forbid it. What he opposed was killing merely out of desire." (8) Thus, the Buddha's doctrine is consistent with his Middle Path. "In this sense, the Buddha differentiated between precepts and rigid rules. He regarded non-violence not as a strict rule, but as a guiding principle or way of life." (9)

This liberated individuals from the burden of rigid regulations, since the Buddha understood that inflexible rules cannot be applied effectively in all situations. As Ambedkar remarked: "No rule gives freedom. Either the rule breaks the man, or the man breaks the rule." (9) Hence, the Buddha emphasized that one must decide with wisdom what to do, since they alone will bear the consequences of their actions. Violence done out of desire causes suffering, while self-restraint and compassion foster happiness.

Thus, one voluntarily adopts the Five Precepts for one's own welfare. Since Buddhism teaches that every action has consequences, the Five Precepts are guidelines that one willingly embraces. They free individuals from selfishness and assist in overcoming suffering. In addition to these, Buddhist texts also prescribe ten wholesome actions (daśa-kuśala-karmāṇi), especially binding on monks, which further aid in liberation from suffering.

The Higher Human Virtues: Compassion, Loving-Kindness, Equanimity, and Sympathetic Joy:

Alongside adherence to moral rules (śīla), Buddhism emphasizes the cultivation of the Brahma-vihāras, or four sublime states: compassion (karuṇā), loving-kindness (maitrī), equanimity (upekṣā), and sympathetic joy (muditā). These are elevated mental qualities that the Buddha urged his followers to embody. Compassion is impartial empathy toward all beings; loving-kindness makes us relate to everyone as a friend; equanimity balances emotions and erases discrimination; sympathetic joy allows us to delight in the happiness of others.

By cultivating these four virtues, individuals experience inner peace while society develops harmony. "These qualities eliminate negative emotions and generate empathy, goodwill, and mental serenity." (10) For the Buddha, compassion is the foundation of society: "Compassion is love; without it, society cannot survive." (11) The Vinaya texts place strong emphasis on contentment and self-restraint, such as the tendencies of renunciation and non-attachment. (12) In this way, the Buddha avoided both extremes of severe asceticism and indulgent pleasure, upholding the Middle Path. (13)

The Concept of the Bodhisattva:

In the Mahāyāna tradition of Buddhism, the concept of the Bodhisattva is central. A Bodhisattva is one who follows the Buddha's path but postpones their own nirvāṇa in order to serve the suffering beings of the world. Such a person takes the vow not to attain final liberation until all beings are freed from suffering. This ideal of the Bodhisattva is unique to Buddhism and is found in no other religion. It represents the highest form of compassion and the supreme ideal of humanity.

Buddhist Ethics and Socio-Political Organization:

The Buddha's ethical teachings bring happiness and peace both to individuals and society. According to him, poverty is the root cause of crime, theft, violence, and falsehood. (14) Therefore, it is the duty of the state to ensure the economic welfare of society. Mere punishment cannot eliminate crime. The Buddha advised that rulers should support agriculture and trade so that farmers and merchants may earn adequate income. "When this happens, people will live without fear, contented, and the nation will remain peaceful." (15)

The Buddha placed great importance on generosity (dāna) and compassion, considering them mutually supportive. "Without compassion, how can society progress?" (16) Clearly, his moral philosophy establishes justice, altruism, and balance within society and governance, which are the pathways to peace and happiness.

Conclusion:

Thus, in today's age, the ethical principles of Buddhism—compassion, loving-kindness, and non-violence—remain profoundly relevant. The Buddha taught that loving-kindness cannot be confined to a single being. His vision is so expansive that if embraced, religious intolerance and sectarian violence could end, discrimination could be eradicated, and the ideals of equality, liberty, and fraternity could be realized in a universal brotherhood.

Buddhism transcends caste, class, nation, and region, advocating the welfare of all. Its message is one of balanced and harmonious living. We therefore see that Buddhism is a rational and scientific philosophy. Compassion, kindness, non-violence, and selflessness form the very foundation of Buddhist ethical consciousness. These virtues ensure the welfare of both the individual and society. The Buddha's teachings inspire justice and public welfare, and present non-violence and altruism as the highest values.

Because Buddhism emphasizes the welfare of all humanity without discrimination, its ethical teachings are as relevant today in a global context as they were in ancient times.

References and Footnotes:

- 1.Ambedkar B.R. (2023),Bhagawan Buddha Aur Unka Dhamma,Jaipur, Buddham Pablihashars, Page, 6
- 2.Ambedkar B.R.(2023),Bhagawan Buddh Aur Unka Dhamma, Jaipur, Buddham Pablihashars, Page-230
- 3.Ambedkar B.R.(2023),Bhagawan Buddha Aur Unka Dhamma, Jaipur ,Buddham Pablihashars, Page-233
- 4.Ambedkar B.R.(2023),Bhagawan buddha Aur Unka Dhamma, Jaipur, Buddham Pablihashars, Page-262
- 5.Ambedkar B.R.(1957),Bhagawan Buddha Aur Unka Dhamma, Government Of India Press, Page, 67,72,180
- 6.Rahula Walpola, What The Buddha Taught, Buddhist Publication Society, Page,59-60
- 7.Ambedkar B.R.(2023),Bhagawan Buddha Aur Unka Dhamma, Jaipur, Buddham Pablihashars, Page ,235
- 8.Ambedkar B.R.(2023),Bhagawan Buddha Aur Unka Dhamma, Jaipur, Buddham Pablihashars, Page-335
- 9.Ambedkar,B.R. (2023),Bhagawan Buddha Aur Unka Dhamma, Buddham Pablihashars, Jaipur, Page, 235

10.Rahula Walpola (1959),What The Buddha Taught, Buddhist Publication Society, Page,59-60

11.Ambedkar B.R.(1957) Bhagawan Buddha Aur Unka Dhamma, Government Of India Press, Page, 69,72,180

12. Kumar Suresh (2018),Buddhist Ethics Relevance And Impact on Contemporary Society, Nai Bhartiya Book

Corporation, Page-240-46

13. Kumar Suresh (2018) Buddhist Ethics Relevance And Impact On Contemporary Society, Nai Bhartiya Book Corporation, Page-240-246

14. Rahula Walpola (1959) What The Buddha Taught, buddhist Publication Society, Page -59-60

15. Rahula Walpola (1959) What The Buddha Taught (1959) Buddhist Publication Society, Page-59-60

16. Ambedkar B.R.(1957) Bhagawan Buddh Aur Unka Dhamma, Government Of India Press, Page, 69,72,180

