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## **HUMAN VALUES IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY: A REVIEW**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to depict human values in Buddhist philosophy. This research is completed in three steps: 1. to present a brief overview on basic human values, 2. to present a brief overview on human values in Buddhist philosophy, 3. the need for human values in today's society. Buddhist philosophy is a philosophy of human essence. This philosophy teaches people the true human values necessary to become complete human beings. That if held, human life can be shaped and inspired by true human values. And human values are the first condition for building order and just society. Human values refer to relatively stable beliefs composed of a number of attitudes. Human values are the thoughts, goals and objectives that govern and guide human behavior, practices and activities. Fairness, honesty and decency serve as the foundation of human values. Respecting

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elders, serving others, good manners, tolerance, fairness, honesty etc. are examples of human values. Human values accelerate the mental development of the individual. And by thus developing personality it paves the way for good governance and puts an end to social decay. A child acquires values from family, school, community, playmates, society and traditions. These rules are also the main criteria for the formation of human values. Basically the things that deserve to be human characteristics and qualities are human values. As a result of nurturing these human values, ideological, religious or sacred issues are awakened over time. Through the concept of emotional and ideological unity, human values emerge psychologically in a person, which order and improve the state, society and family. And in this world, the teaching of Buddhist philosophy has strengthened human values among mankind. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present basic human values and human values in Buddhist philosophy, the need for human values in today's society as well.

**Keywords:** Honesty, Kindness, Peace, Wisdom, and Compassion.

## **Introduction**

Ethics and Human values are the core teaching of Buddhist philosophy. Morality and human values are what separate humans from all other creatures. Who has no morals, no moral values; he cannot be righteous. Because the training of all persuasions and doctrines are honesty, morality and human values. Integrity is being true to oneself, morality is being free from responsibility; human values are doing better than what people anticipate. Make musketeers with the adversary. These are the main doctrines of all persuasions. Buddhism holds and

propagates the same beliefs and trueness. Thus, to be a real human being, human values are needed, for which the practice of honesty and chastity is essential. The Buddhist philosophy also holds this belief and moves forward with time and world. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present basic human values and human values in Buddhist philosophy, the need for human values in today's society as well.

### **Research methodology**

It is easy to feel that human values are a very valuable teaching in Buddhist philosophy. Its application is constantly happening in human life. Still, there is no doubt that its theory and data are largely based on Buddhist texts. Therefore, the discussion research has been written by collecting and analyzing theories and data from various sources including Buddhist texts, history, traditions, journals, magazines and so on. Consequently qualitative method was followed to complete the research. And it can be clearly said that the research has been completed through content analysis under qualitative method.

### **Review of literatures**

Notable research works on the subject are: *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations Values and Issues* (Harvey, 2000), the book deals with Buddhist ethics, economics, war and peace etc. *Sutta Nipāta* (Laurence Trans., 2015) the author highlights the teachings of Buddha on human values in the book. *The Social Structure of Values* (Rathakamal edition: reprint 2005) among the topics discussed by the author in the book are: A sociological theory of values, the social origin and evaluations of values and norm etc. *The Group of Discourses Sutta-Nipāta* (Norman Trans., 1992), Buddha's moral teachings and

philosophy are highlighted in the book. *The Dhammapada: The Path to the Truth* (Narada Trans., 1st ed. 1963), the book deals with Buddha's moral teachings and human values. Therefore, it appears that there is a considerable lack of institutional and academic research on the subject. So there is ample justification for the discussion research.

### **1. The brief overview on basic human values**

The meaning of the word 'human' is related to people; humane; kind hearted (Hornby, p. 634- 635) and another word 'value' is deduced from Latin 'Valerie'. It means 'strong' and 'vigorous'. To put it another way, the word value is formed grounded on the etymological meaning of three Latin words. The words are Vale (meaning strength), Val (meaning worth) and Value (meaning valor). Inclusively these words mean 'all good effects'. Still, introductory mortal values relate to those values which are at the core of being mortal. The values which are considered introductory essential values in humans include verity, honesty, loyalty, love, peace, etc. because they bring out the abecedarian virtuousness of mortal beings and society at large. 'Introduction to the 'value proposition' when we suppose of our values, we suppose of what's important to us in our lives: security, independence, wisdom, success, kindness, pleasure. Each of us holds multitudinous values with varying degrees of significance. A particular value may be veritably important to one person, but insignificant to another. Consensus regarding the most useful way to conceptualize introductory values has surfaced gradually since the 1950's. (Radha, p. 17)'

People who value similar human values in their lives and explore openings. Also, it results in trying new gests and enjoying them. These individualities are frequently career

acquainted. However, the bases of human values are religion, philosophy, long cherished behavior, belief, society's own ideals and rules. The ideas of the people of the society about good-bad, wrong-right, desirable-undesirable issues are considered as human values through the customs and traditions existing in the society. It can also be said that human values are all principles and standards that govern human behavior. Man's standards of behavior depend on his own beliefs and principles. Human values are influenced by religion. This has gone beyond the family, society and the state to take place in the minds, thoughts, ideas and beliefs of people all over the world (Radha, p. 17). Human values are developed from the experiences gained by living together in the same society for a long time. And human values are the main driving force of a society or state. Lacking it, the social, economic, political standards of the state are exposed to criticism. Standards of human behavior depend on beliefs and principles. And the sum of those beliefs and principles are human values.

Therefore, a society with moral ideals means a society in which there will be no lawlessness, injustice, usury, bribery, corruption, exploitation, oppression, selfishness and these unethical practices. That society is called a society based on moral ideals. A life free from all of corruption, injustice, dishonesty is considered an ideal life. Apart from this, the practice of adhering to one's own religious customs according to one's religious beliefs, staying on the path of truth, not harming others, being benevolent, etc. is the development or manifestation of morality in a simple sense. Human character is the result of moral values. So it can be seen that the words ethics and values are considered complementary to each other. The first education of morals and

values begins with family education. Later it grew from school, college, university education.

## 2. The brief overview of human values in Buddhist philosophy

Gautama Buddha set a great example for the ideal human life. Siddhartha Gautama shunned the life of luxury and took up the life of a monk. He discovered various virtues for human life which help a man to lead an ideal life. *Suttas* like ‘*Nālaka Sutta*’, ‘*Pabbajjā Sutta*’, ‘*Padhāna Sutta*’ etc. play an important role in developing Buddhist philosophy and ethics and building human values. Such as giving up anger, giving up violence, living life without joy, cultivating kindness and charity, respect, philanthropy, and other human values, etc. especially in the pursuit of moral excellence, the various sagas, sayings and examples, and similes of ‘*Sutta Nipāta*’ are unique and instructive for humanity. Buddha’s teachings promote moral and human values and human excellence. ‘*Mahāmangalasutra*’ can be mentioned in this context. It is mentioned in the ‘*Sutta-Nipāta*’ text,

*Bāhusaccañ ca sippañ ca vinayo ca  
susikkhito*

*Subhāsītā ca yā vācā, etaṃ....*

(Dines and Helmer, p. 47)

This is broad knowledge, skill, and well-mastered discipline, well-spoken words: This is the highest protection. (Thanissaro, p. 5)

*Ārati virati pāpā majjapānā ca saññamo*

*Appamādo ca dhammesu, etaṃ....*

(Dines and Helmer, p. 47)

This is giving, living in rectitude, assistance to one's relatives, and deeds that are blameless: This is the highest protection. (Thanissaro, p. 5)

*Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi cittaṃ yassa  
na kampaṭi  
Asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ, etaṃ....*  
(Dines and Helmer, p. 47)

That is a man that when touched by the ways of the world, is unshaken, sorrowless, dustless, and secure: This is the highest protection. (Thanissaro, p. 5)

Although there are many discussions about goodness in the '*Mangala Sutra*', these are the teaching of moral, human and social values. The education of human values acquired by performing these good deeds makes human life beautiful. First of all, it is said not to serve the foolish or the ignorant, but to serve the wise or the learned. It means abandoning the company of fools and seeking the company of a wise or learned person. In it life is enlightened, and prosperity comes. It will never hurt.

The absolute truth is that living with or befriending a fool is miserable. Because they are ignorant, judgmental, and senseless. They don't even have relevant knowledge. So they act halfway about good and bad. It has to be constantly faced with suffering. On the other hand, the closeness of the wise or scholars is sweet and pleasant. Their closeness can never be a cause of sorrow, but life is enlightened. Besides, there is also giving worship or respect to a venerable or honorable person. There is a great lack of this in today's society. Therefore, it is a very auspicious act to give respect and dignity to suitable

wise men, scholars and *Sramanas-Brahmins*-religious *gurus*, education *gurus*, *acharyas*, and parents-elders. There is no harm or dishonor in it.

Apart from this, various aspects of human values have emerged in ‘*Mangala Sutra*’. It is said, to be forgiving, and follow the example of elders. Pursue *sīla-samādhi*-wisdom and practice truth, follow the true path. Refrain from the evil deeds of greed, hatred, and infatuation. Refrain from intoxicating substances such as alcohol-*marijuana*. Keep your mind away from all kinds of obscene and sinful activities. Out of gratitude, it is a good deed to stand by people in danger, including relatives and friends. So holding and cherishing all these human values is good for people. At the same time, the welfare of society and the state is achieved. According to ‘*Mettā Sutta*’,

*Na ca khuddaṃ samācare kiñci yena viññū pare  
upavadeyyuṃ,*

*Sukhino vā khemino hontu sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā.*

(Norman, p. 26)

That is do not the slightest thing that the wise would later censure. Think: happy, at rest, may all beings be happy at heart. (Thanissaro, p. 9)

*Na paro paraṃ nikubbetha nātimaññetha katthaci naṃ kañci,  
Byārosanā paṭighasaññā nāññamaññassa dukkhamiccheyya.*

(Norman, p. 26)

That is let no one deceive another or despise anyone anywhere, or through anger or resistance wish for another to suffer. (Thanissaro, p. 9)



We should maintain harmony with all living beings and animals around us. Because this world is full of living world and animal worlds. Here all animals should be allowed to live safely in their place. Otherwise, a hostile environment is created or the pattern becomes intolerable. In today's world, the natural environment is becoming unbearable for this reason only. The biosphere and nature-environment are losing their right to live every moment. Forests, seas, and rivers, especially the animals and plants, grasses, vines, and leaves in the water and land have kept us alive. Still, they were killed. Besides, it is better not to harbor enmity towards anyone, not to deprive each other, and not to cause suffering among each other by envy. It should be remembered that no one in the world is an enemy or an opponent. In this context, the '*Dhammapada*' holds,

*Nahi verena verāni-sammantī'dha kudācanaṃ,  
Averena ca sammanti-esa dhammo sanantano.*  
(Narada, p. 8)

That is "hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through love alone does it cease. This is an eternal law."

That is why the human values and moral appeal of the '*Mettā sutta*' are always to be friendly, to speak the truth, to be virtuous, and to acquire sound knowledge. In discussing Buddhist human values, it is relevant to quote a famous quote from the '*Dhammapada*' about '*Mettā*'.

*Akkodhena jine kodhaṃ-asādhuṃ sādhuṇā jine  
Jine kadariyaṃ dānena-saccena alikavādinaṃ.*  
(Narada, p. 190)

That is "conquer anger by love. Conquer evil with good. Conquer the stingy by giving. Conquer the liar by truth."

Such a theory is found in ‘*Parābhava Sutta*’. The word ‘*parābhava*’ means defeat. ‘Failure’ is a very painful, reviled, hated, and insulted word for human life. How human defeat occurs in human life is described in detail in the ‘*Parābhava Sutta*’. But in this case, the ‘*citta*’ is real. Because everything originates in the mind (*citta*) and becomes action from there. So two *gāthā* of ‘*Dhammapada*’ can be mentioned in this context:

*Diso disaṃ yaṃ taṃ rayirā-verī vā pana verinaṃ  
Micchāpanihitaṃ cittaṃ-pāpiyo naṃ tato rare.*

(Narada, p.44)

That is “whatever (harm) a foe may do to a foe, or a hater to a hater, an ill-directed mind can do one far greater (harm).”

*Na taṃ mātā pitā kayirā-aññe vā pi ca ñātakā  
Sammā panihitaṃ cittaṃ-seyyaso naṃ tato kare.*

(Narada, p. 45)

That is “what neither mother, nor father, nor any other relative can do, a well-directed mind does and thereby elevates one.”

To make life beautiful, dignified, and peaceful, moral, social, and human good deeds must be desirable and committed. This increase his fame and fortune. In this context, it is described in ‘*Dhammapada*’,

*Na pupphagandho paṭivāraṃ eti-na candanaṃ  
tagaramallikā vā*

*Satañ ca gandho paṭivātam eti-sabbā disā sappuriso pavāti.*

(Narada, p. 56)

That is “the perfume of flowers blows not against the wind, nor does the fragrance of sandalwood, *tagara*, and *jasmine*, but

the fragrance of the virtuous blows against the wind; the virtuous man pervades every direction.” So in this context, it is necessary to build our life according to social, political, religious, moral, and human values.

More information about human values is available in ‘*Nidhikanda Sutta*’. In this ‘*sutta*’, human virtue and good deeds have been given priority. Valuable wealth is acquired through skillful and virtuous deeds. This acquired wealth is always for oneself. Virtue removes all kinds of misery and deprivation of gods and men. The triple property of human beings, divine property of gods, and *nirvāna* property can be obtained only through this virtue. This virtue can be achieved through *sīla*, *samādhi*, and wisdom. The power of virtuous property is infinite. More such virtues and human values have been discussed in this ‘*sutta*’:

*Yassa dānena sīlena, saṃyamena damena ca;  
Nidhī sunihito hoti, itthiyā purisassa vā.  
(Ānandajoti Bhikkhu, p.16)*

That is when a man or woman has laid aside a well-stored fund of giving, virtue, restraint, & self-control.

The qualities or character traits of true Brahmins that emerge in the ‘*Bāsettha Sutta*’ should be inculcated in the lives of all wise and virtuous great men of the world. Racism and communalism are never desirable. Caste, *gotra*, and clan cannot be the identity of a true Brahmin. Good deeds and good thinking are the characteristics of a true Brahmin. All these virtues make human life blessed and glorified and lead to proper human life. In today’s world, conflicts and violence based on caste, religion, wealth have become commonplace. So, if humanity was a

religion, the world would be much more beautiful. So we will be strong in merit, not caste or clan status. Therefore, to possess all these qualities of humanity is above the boundaries of country time and geography through which individuals, families, society, and the world can benefit. At the same time, all kinds of violence, conflicts, and wars in the world can occur. This policy and philosophy of Buddha show light to the people of the world against the caste system, community, and religious superstitions. (Ānandajoti Bhikkhu, p. 16) This light is fully human, moral, non-discriminating, and full of knowledge and wisdom.

The main application of ‘*Dhaniya Sutta*’ is to achieve the excellence of the heart or the heart and to cultivate the good thoughts and good deeds of the heart. Especially by sowing the seeds of human values in the heart, one can become thirstless, and sorrowless, and exalt oneself through the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and wisdom. In this context, the ‘*Dhammapada*’ says: “whoever is perfect virtue and insight, established in the *Dhamma*, has realized the truths, and fulfilled his duties-people hold him, dear.” (Narada, p. 185) The Buddha also said in the ‘*Dhaniya Sutta*’,

“*Cittaṃ mama assvaṃ vimuttaṃ*  
*iti Bhagavā*  
*dīgharattaṃ paribhābitaṃ sudantaṃ*  
*Pāpaṃ pana me na vijjati,*  
*atha ce....”*

(Dines and Helmer, p. 4)

That is my mind is attentive from passion freed, and long trained in wisdom’s way, well-tamed indeed: evil in me, what searcher can espy? So, it likes thee, rain on sky (Laurence, p. 7)!

The priceless teachings of the ‘*Sigālavāda Sutta*’ are not only for the India of the Buddha’s time or the domestic society of that time; it will be helpful as a bit of unique advice in living the present and future household life. These words or bits of advice can be said to be universal and for all times. Because of its lack and inaccessibility in the social system of the whole world, the decline of morals, the decline of fundamentals, and various anarchies and disasters are happening in the social and state life in the family, social and global spheres. Therefore, it is necessary to follow and practice the priceless advice of this ‘*sutta*’ in our life. There are five precepts (*pañcasīla*)<sup>1</sup> in Buddhist philosophy that play a strong role in developing morality and human values.

However, the steps of the ‘*pañcasīla*’ and ‘Noble Eightfold Paths’<sup>2</sup> play an outstanding role in creating morals and human values which can be easily realized. In this world, the compassion, sympathy, and love that people show towards humans and other animals and develop humanity, play also an important role in creating human values.

By practicing Buddhist modesty (*vinaya*), belief in and practice of action (*karma*), the practice of *pārami*, the practice of virtue, service to the sick, practice of morality, love, harmony, self-analysis, increasing self-reliance, increasing patience and tranquility, persevering, spreading peace, truly human values will be achieved.

### **3. The need for human values in today’s society**

Buddha spoke many beautiful morals and human values for the welfare of mankind. It is mentioned and it is very important for today’s society and mankind. That’s why it’s necessary, actions such as serving parents, being well-educated and modest,

glorifying honorable people, being obedient, showing modesty, being forgiving, practicing *sīla*, refraining from various types of sinful activities, and being temperate are very good and beneficial actions of life. As life becomes noble in it, a beautiful and ideal life is developed. As the individual is happy there, the family, society, and country are happy and beautiful. It can also be idealized.

Human values are thoughts and actions centered on people. They play a vital role in the life cycle of a human being. Human values help us to grow and succeed in our life. Simply human values can be regarded as a decision-making quality of a person. Every decision should be made in an organization or a company based on human values.

Morality and human values are closely related to conscience. Only a conscientious person can possess moral and human values. Consciousness works together or in conjunction with purpose. If conscience dictates to act with a good motive, it must be full of moral and human values. It can also be said that awakening conscience is considered part of morality and human values. For example, if someone does something with good intentions, if the result is bad, then he should not be called inhuman. Because his intentions were right and honest. But if the motive is not right or honest, it will be a dehumanizing act. It is usually noticeable in the trial of judges. For example, it is acceptable if a judge errs in judgment with good intentions. (Nafisa Banu, 2022) Because, if the judge reviews the evidence with an honest and impartial motive and finds no substance in it, then he will dismiss the case. Even if his judgment is wrong, he will be considered innocent by the standards of morality and human values. Because as far as he is concerned, he has no choice but to make a decision based

on the correct and available information. No matter what we say, people get religious education from their families. Everyone learns moral values through their scriptures. At present, our society is facing the degradation of human values in many areas. This is mainly due to a lack of morals and human values. In the eyes of today's society, human values are seen as complete human beings and those who promote human values do not in many cases try to implement them in their personal lives. Morality, ideals, and human values are being lost in the cycle of narrow interests. However, there are exceptional people who do not deviate from moral ideals and human values even in the worst of times. Although their numbers are very few, society today can be said to survive somewhat because of them. At present, society and the state are gradually proceeding towards disorder and chaos. So in this case it is important to prevent this degradation and disorder. Due to the degradation of human values in society today, murders and riots are increasing. Juvenile crime is on the rise these days. People are killing people for the slightest interest. Minimum morality or human values do not work among the people of the society. Different types of crimes are increasing in society. If this society is not saved from the degradation of human values, it will also affect the state. For this, it is necessary to practice ethics and human values. This can be initiated from different levels of a family, society, or state. People in the developed countries of the world practice ethics and human values in their daily lives. (Nafisa Banu, 2022) At present, our first need has to be to steer the education system in the right direction. Our goodwill is essential in spreading education which helps our young generation to be wise, skilled, and understanding of good and bad and also can make them as fair, tasteful, democratic patriots with aesthetic morals,

and humanitarian sense and above all enlightened people. In Buddhist philosophy, the need for *sīla*<sup>3</sup>, *samādhi*<sup>4</sup>, and wisdom<sup>5</sup> are essential for the prosperity of life. Life is never complete without these three. Virtues like ‘*mettā*<sup>6</sup>’, compassion<sup>7</sup> (*karuṇā*), kindness<sup>8</sup> (*muditā*), disregard<sup>9</sup> (*upekshā*), and kindness, service, charity, compassion, love, tolerance, philanthropy, etc. are needed to make life full of humanity. These are what teach a man to be compassionate and friendly, giving him the dignity of a true man. Ethical and humane values make people complete human beings. People without morals and human values are equal to animals. However, morals and human values are not the same for everyone. Some have more or some have less. So, the time has come, when everyone should work together to make the country developed, civilized, and pollution-free through the practice of morality and human values in the family, society and state. It should be considered a national duty for all. Only the practice of correct morality and human values can save the individual, family, society, and state from degradation.

## Conclusion

In the context of the above discussion, it can be said that the ideal of human behavior, what people should do in society, and what is considered good, is the true form of human values. Due to the lack of human values, the family, society and state face degradation. Family, society, and state are woven together. Therefore, if the family declines, it affects society and the state. And at the root of degeneration is apostasy, abuse of religion, religious narrowness, intolerance, and lack of mutual respect. Therefore, there is no alternative to creating an order of responsibility among citizens, expanding, nurturing, and practicing religious values in order to create a nation with moral humane values and a building society



without degradation. And for this reason, kindness, wisdom, goodness, tranquility and self-restraint are particularly important human values in Buddhist philosophy. So, one should try to learn all human values which are helpful in understanding the importance of human values in the modern world.

### Notes

1. The five *sīla* are: a) Refrain from killing animals, b) Abstaining from receiving objects, c) Abstaining from illicit sexual activity, d) Refrain from telling lies, and e) Abstaining from intoxicants and indulgence.
2. Right View, Right Determination, Right Word, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.
3. The word '*sīla*' means principle. At every level of human life, there are various types of statutory principles. Among these myriad principles are some universal and eternal principles, which make people aware of do's and don'ts. Morality (*sīla*) is the principle of non-performance of actions against human welfare or of refraining from such actions.
4. Concentration of mind is *samādhi*. Renunciation of the distractions of the mind or *citta* is its sign. In the exegetical tradition, '*samādhi*' is defined as concentration, the one-pointed mind.
5. Knowledge gained at the experiential level is called wisdom (*prajñā*). Living a virtuous life and practicing meditation are necessary conditions for gaining *prajñā*.
6. To keep the mind of compassion for all beings awakened is *mettā*. Kindness, benevolence, willingness to serve, etc.

are stages of '*mettā*'. The opposite of '*mettā*' is hatred and anger, and the indirect opposite is personal attachment or love or egoism. So if you are a follower of '*mettā*', you have to give up hatred, anger, and egoism completely. All kinds of creatures should be imbued with immeasurable love. Should be spontaneously enthusiastic about charity, religion, cooperation, philanthropy, etc. Only then will the practice of '*mettā*' be fulfilled.

7. Seeing other people's suffering is melting the heart, and being active in relieving other people's suffering. Taking a role in relieving the suffering of others with a clean heart. Compassion (*karuṇā*) is accepting the suffering of others as one's own by completely eliminating envy, anger, and cruelty. Compassion (*karuṇā*) is twofold. One is the feeling of inclination or sincerity, the other is the arrangement to relieve the distress of the disaster. One is consciousness based and the other is action based.
8. The third stage of *Brahmavihāra* pursuit is *muditā*. *Muditā* is not only to express sympathy but also to find joy and happiness in the happiness of others. When people have no sense of selfishness, only then can people be happy with the happiness of other. If you can rise to this level of worship then there is no difference between yourself and others. *Muditā* is a name inspired by such a sense of unity.
9. Ignoring the highest and last stage of *Brahmavihāra*'s pursuit. When people reach this level, they do not have any personal desires. Hence this layer is called Ignorance. Indifference generally refers to impartiality devoid of greed and hatred. This neutrality is a characteristic of nature acquired due to

one's pursuit and practice which keeps the mind fixed on the good of others. Criticism or praise, gain or loss, success or failure, happiness or sorrow, etc. cannot disturb the mind due to attraction and fickleness.

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