

BUDDHISTIC HUMANISM: A PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUE*** Prof. Dr. Victor Babu Koppula**<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21078285>**Abstract:**

The ideals projected by a Philosophy become important particularly when these can be practically realized into realities in the sense that they can be practiced by one and all in their lives. Mere dogmatic observances are to no avail and emphatically one can say that when a philosophical system does not contribute to the no aiming of life its intent and purpose lack the ability to which the life. Philosophies of the orient and their traditions added value and became the Philosophy of life thus becoming inseparable Dan Universality of Vision. Due attention to aspects of life without ignoring the character, paying attention to human nature, endorsing the intellectual and emotional sides of the human being all these desirable aspects and a study of this with rational approach and logic would address issues to understand the human aspiration. Human enterprises largely confine themselves to parochial objectives and in a way, philosophy addresses psychological and social criteria.

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Introduction

The philosophy of Buddhism does not differentiate theory and practice. The teachings of the Buddha carry ideals and can be realized by every individual in his/her life. Briefly the contemporary humanism looks at the philosophy of Naturalism, Ethical contribution, free thought, culture movements, sciences, democracy, civil liberties, materialism, literature, and arts. These are affiliations of the humanist philosophy. French Philosopher Emanuel Levinas (1906-95) observes a sound philosophical system could be erected not on metaphysical or epistemological foundations but only on firm ethical foundations.¹ The Philosophy of Buddhism as us at self-perfection, integrating religious and moral ideals. Since the beginning of world evolution, human beings time and energy went in the direction of improving external conditions primarily for happiness and to seek solutions for their many problems. The practice of Dharma, (Pali Dhamma) the predominant teaching of Buddhism lays emphasis on the control of mind and not to indulge in non-virtuous action. Psychological transformation of human mind and the methods to bring in transformation all this for moral perfection,

an absolute necessity, the whole objective being to make worldly life peaceful, meaningful. We have and exist in ignorance and because of this we do not know the actual state of affairs. Buddha's Dhamma awakens people, removing ignorance and leading them to the state of wisdom. Suffice it would be to add that the intent is to know the reality of life and Buddhism offers many criteria which suit the practical wants of the human kind. These aspects will be dealt with in this paper. A little more insight is essential to have a good grasp of humanism around which life and its wants revolve.

Humanism

Corliss Lamont says that Humanism is many faceted philosophy congenial to this modern age, yet fully aware of the lessons of history and the richness of the Philosophic tradition. The central propositions he deals are (1) Humanism believes in a naturalistic attitude toward the universe, (2) human beings are an evolutionary product of nature, (3) reliance primarily upon reason and scientific method applied with courage and vision, (4) while conditioned by the past, passes genuine freedom of creative choice and action, (5) believes in morality and relationships, (6) personal satisfaction and continuous self-

development (7) aesthetic experience, a reality in the lines of all people (8) Democracy, peace, high standard of living on economic foundations at national as well as International levels (9) Parliamentary government, with full freedom of expression and civil liberties and (10) unending questioning of basic assumptions and convictions.²

Buddhism Receives Respectful Attention

Buddha is universally recognized as the perfect embodiment of the ethical and spiritual ideals. Buddhism is the greatest of the non-theistic faiths. Salvation by peaceful means and providing an ethics-based ideals are noteworthy features and Gautama the Buddha, is universally recognized as the perfect embodiment of these qualities. "In the course of fifteen centuries of uninterrupted development on Indian Soil its inherent spiritual vitality has found expression, in a multitude of forms."³ Buddha's understanding of the nature of man distinctly upholds the characteristics such as capability, intelligence, emotions and sociability which became the natural foundations of morality. The emphasis is that these qualities need to be controlled and human effort plays a vital role.

Buddhism lays stress on the purification of mind or consciousness (*citta*) which becomes the source of attendant values such as moral perfection, peace, and harmony. The point here is that purity of thought, view, and moral habits condition the individual and lead him on the moral path and this leads to the attainment of *nibbana*, the ultimate; being different to the Upanishad approach to liberation by identity of self. Wholesome values need to be cultivated and for this the right attitude, relationships and correct turning of mind is essential self-effort with concentration shows the path and observance of Buddha's Four Noble Truths with rational thinking and meditation cause awakening.

Returning to the theme of the paper that Buddhism in many ways offered principles and ethical foundations to help human kind live in peace and harmony. The materialistic world consists of economic, political and sensuous pleasures. The desire to amass wealth stems from the fact that the people in the society are greedy and corrupt and do not have an iota of concern for the welfare of the others. The recent decades of experience in India and other countries show appalling examples of hatred and this lack of love and compassion disturb

the fabric of happy living. Indian scriptures *Bhagavad-Gita* and Upanishads leave provided enormous guide lines for righteous living. To a large extent the society is balanced but it is only the sin of the few that hilt the balance and cause loss of moral norms. "According to Aristotle, the essential feature of human beings in rationality. Therefore, humans are not only inquisitive but also capable of self-introspection. Buddha was an ethical teacher and his approach to mitigate suffering using simple and practical methods has clearly helped. Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar and many other social reformers in India and elsewhere in the world came under the influence of the Buddhist ideals.

Ethics and Virtues

Mind, its role, and importance has been discussed and unless the mind is controlled, negative factors set in and the individual will be driven into a life pattern consisting of indiscipline and actions as a result are derogatory. Desires and ego play their roles and these hindrances cause upsets and disturb the equilibrium of a healthy all peaceful living. Sila (Sanskrit) is usually translated into English as 'Virtuous behaviour', "morality", "ethics" or "precept". Man is essentially concerned with

life in the world of the senses. The desire to achieve the ultimate goal, rising above the mundane exists. Balancing these two routes, the individual has to observe the rules and guidelines, and move in the direction, holding on to the moral values stipulated. Meditation helps in experiencing joy all peace of higher consciousness.

Buddhist ethics is not restricted to any caste, creed, race, religion and language. Like Kant's categorical imperative, Buddhist ethics has universal application. Doctrine of dependent / origination (*Paticca - Samuppada/ Pratitya - samutpada*), Four Noble Truths represent the quintessence of the philosophy of Buddhism. Buddhist ethics are highly practicable and can be translated into concrete realities. Social evils such as violation of human rights, war, suicide are abundant in today's world, and one can look to the doctrines of Buddhism for rescue to combat these traits. It is not the lack of scriptural guidance but it is the apathy of the individuals to ignore moral principles for their own benefits. This is an ongoing problem and one can look for solace from the concepts of Buddhism in order to have a peaceful existence. Looking at the five precepts of Buddhism; non-injury, avoiding lying and sobriety; all these are ideals for

right livelihood. The ethics of inter-personal relationships emphasizes on moral restraints and Buddhist approach is towards developing loving kindness all compassion. Dhammapada 223 says "Let a man overcome anger by love, let him overcome evil by good; let him overcome the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth!"⁴ "Every human being must be treated equally and without discrimination on grounds of race, nationality, religion, sex, colour, age, mental ability or political views. Hatred and anger are to be dealt with by restraint from behaviour harming others, cultivation of loving kindness and compassion"⁵

Noble Eightfold Path (*Ashtamarga*)

Noble Eightfold path is one of the principal teachings of the Buddha, who described it as the way leading to the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*) and the achievement of self-awakening. Understanding reality, eradicating greed, hatred and delusion are the primary concepts embedded. "According to the discourages in the Pali and Chinese canons, right view, right resolve, right speech, right effort, and right mindfulness are used as the support and requisite conditions for the practice of right concentration."⁶

Noble Eightfold path includes intellectual, contemplative and moral virtues and practices. Referring to Buddha and Nagarjuna, Hari Shankar Prasad writes, "Like Post modernists, they are critical of the role of pure reason, metaphysics, foundationalism, essentialism, divine design, teleology in creation, scriptural revelations, temptation of mysticism, objectivity of reality, absolute truth-claim, referentiality of language and meaning, totalitarianism, universalism etc. The arrogant claim of scientific reason and technological means to liberate humanity from suffering and to bring ultimate happiness, without transforming man's attitude, has no place in their scheme of thought"⁷

Contemporary Society

Technological development on the one hand has immensely helped the humankind, in catering to their needs and comforts, but on the other, to a very large extent made the individual dependent. Moral rationality and values have eroded because of the changed life styles. "the place which values occupy in life is so important that no philosopher, whose theme is the whole experience, can—to take account of them".⁸

Domination of humans and giving importance to relationships, kindness (*metta*), not harming living creatures and maintaining a life of participation with a give and take policy, all these add to the quality of human life. The problem of the present world is that every individual tends to use the other as a means to achieve his ends. Material progress provides comforts, but one has to have a balanced mind in order to uphold the Buddhist virtues.

“Health is the greatest of gifts,
contentedness the best riches:
trust is the best of relationships,
nirvana the highest happiness!!⁹

Every individual is expected to live happily and with contentment which is the greatest wealth. The unlimited use of technology is causing enormous damage to nature, ecology and the material desires of the human kind, unchecked, trigger destruction. Buddhism respects human nature and Mahatma Gandhi's views on human rights are “I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and prescribed come from duty well done. Thus, the very right to live accrues to us only when we do the citizenship of the world. From this one fundamental statement perhaps, it is easy

enough to define the duties of man and woman and correlate every right to some corresponding duty to be first performed.¹⁰

Summing Up

Buddhism, as an influential religion, emphasized on ethical doctrines which teach an individual how to shape his life. Existential problems take prominence over speculative approaches, thus making Buddhism the greatest, realistic and pragmatic. Self-perfection is the main requirement and the individual should recognize the fact that, others too exist in the society and “*Samgha*” gains importance in Buddhism. Cardinal virtues such as non-injury, non-stealing, tolerance, love, kindness, benevolence, gratitude and reverence for elders, all these add value to life. Mutual trust, respect and love pave the way for a good leaving and to live in a society one must cultivate the qualities such as charity, sympathy and sharing with others. Life is dear to everyone and the idealism of Buddhism has to be pursued. “The Buddhist ethics does not have its roots in any dogma or mysticism”. In his philanthropic concern for human welfare and the extrication of suffering without any reference to godhead, the Buddha set-up a congenial theoretical base for an egalitarian

society.¹¹ Training the mind, practicing Dharma, not misinterpreting, not to be erratic, not to be boastful not to get angry and not wishing gratitude, all these aid the purpose of this life by providing a means for attaining liberation and enlightenment. In the words of T.R.V. Murti, "The student of Philosophy can only suggest that the Madhyamika Absolutism can serve as the basis for a possible world culture.... The malady of the world is far too universal and deep-seated for remedies to be prescribed direct from books. A spiritual genius of the order of Buddha or Christ alone knows how to strike at the thing."¹²

As long as people do not heed the sacred advice of the scriptures and take to the spiritual values of life, they meet with sorrow and suffering in life. Living only to fulfilling sense gratification is detrimental and history has shown that generations experience rise and fall of nations.

As indicated earlier on, there are many guidelines and dictums available and scriptures of any religions do suggest do's don'ts and adhering to is a need. The world today is experiencing turmoil, with ward, terrorism and all sorts of atrocities. It is highly essential that this drift is arrested and every one with a global citizen concept

must educate, learn, experience and pass on the peaceful coexistence conditions for ensuring happiness are prosperity. It is in this context that Buddhism has plenty to offer and its ethical, moral and social aspects are applicable and suitable to the needs of the pre-sort centime as well as future.

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