

Research Article

Universal Ethics and Human Cultural Values through the Teachings of *Gautama Buddha*: Some Observations from the Perspective of Philosophical Anthropology

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Abstract: Philosophical Anthropology is one of the subfields of Social-Cultural Anthropology. Social-Cultural Anthropology is the holistic, comparative and integrated study of society and culture in and space. Ethics as well as universal ethics and allied social values are considered as the ideal cultural patterns under the preview of cultural universals in Anthropology. Buddhism is a missionary salvation religion, as taught by the Lord Buddha in the North Indian Gangetic plain in the sixth and the early fifth centuries BC, on the domain of universal ethics and human values Hence it becomes a concern as a religious system in the field of anthropology of Religion. The data gained from the information on the prime objectives of the present study have been readily analyzed with conventional qualitative technique as a whole. The present paper aims to observe Buddha's teachings on human universal ethics and socio-cultural values as exemplary philosopher from the perspective of cultural as well as philosophical anthropology. His philosophy as the world of the people of the sixth century BC was a practical and applied one to live wisely it also highlights. His four Noble Truths and Eight-fold path fake for promoting social ethics and individual values.

Keywords: universal ethics; *Gautam Buddha*; Eight-fold paths

1. Introduction

In humans, it is culture that sets the limits of behavior and guides it along predictable paths that are generally acceptable to those who fall within the culture. Anthropologists conceived the modern concept of culture toward the end of the 19th century. The first really clear and comprehensive definition of 'Culture' came from the British anthropologists Sir Edward Tylor (1871) as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" Recent definitions of culture land to distinguish clearly between actual behavior and the abstract ideas, values, and perceptions of the world that inform that behavior. To put it another way, culture goes deeper than observable behavior, it is a society's shared and socially transmitted ideas, values, and perceptions, which are used to make sense of experience and generate behavior and are reflected in behavior (Haviland, et al. 2008). Therefore, in its very basic sense cultural norms and values are burned and shared. One learns one's cultural norms and values by growing up with it, and the process are whereby transmitted from generation to the next, as authentic only among the human, is called 'enculturation', similarly, as a shared set of ideas, values, perceptions, and standards of behavior, culture in the common denominator. That makes the actions of individuals intelligible to other members of their society. It enables them to predict how others are most likely to behave in given circumstances, and it tells them how to react accordingly. So, cultural learning is based on the learning of society's ideal and actual norms, values and allied ethical issues. And, on the basis of cultural learning, people, interact, interrelate, create, remember and deal with ideas in day-to-day life. The sets of 'control mechanisms' for governing the behavior are achieved through enculturation in particular traditions People gradually internalize a previously established system of meanings and symbols. They use this cultural system to define their world, express

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their feelings, and make their judgments. This system helps to guide their behavior and perceptions throughout their lives (Geertz, 1973; Kottak, 2000).

Many charismatic leaders, being the exemplary philosopher often bear such wisdom and of attain enlightenment of ideal values and universal ethics around their socioreligious world. *Siddhartha*, as well as *Gautama Buddha* was one of such personalities who attained enlightenment under the *Bodhi* tree, presented his philosophy as well as worldviews of the values and ethics on the people of the sixth century B. C.

Aim and Objectives: The present study aims to let us observe at presenting the exemplary philosopher cum mentor, *Gautama Buddha* as the presenter of ideal philosophy as well as worldview to the people of the sixth century B.C from and interface between cultural anthropology and philosophical anthropological perspectives. The main objectives of the study are the following:

- (i) To observe and interpret the philosophy of *Gautam Buddha* in terms of cultural values and ethics as aimed for the happiness of all, and
- (ii) To observe and interpret how the ideal paths and goals of life promote social ethics and individual values.

2. Materials and Methods

The data gained from the information on the prime objectives of the present study have been readily analyzed with conventional qualitative technique as a whole. Then the description of the facts and finally the interpretation of the facts as well as events of picking out of key features as identified have been recorded. The wider analyses of the findings in the light of relevant historical literatures have been conducted for the present qualitative study. Figure 1 show the research design applied during the investigation.

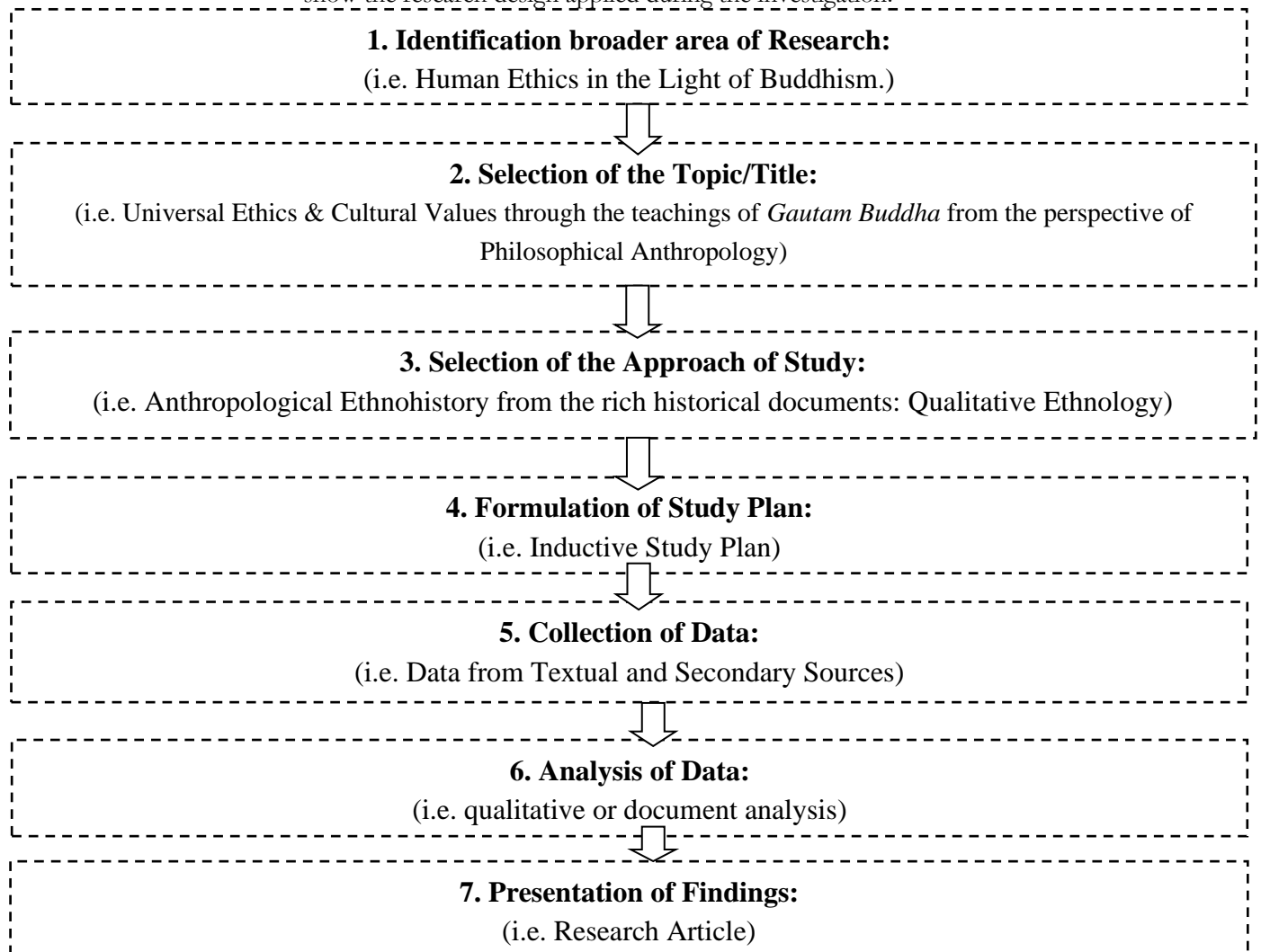


Figure 1. Research design applied during the investigation.

In order to reach the proposed aim and objectives from the perspective of culture as well as philosophical anthropology, the empirical data have been collected from the books, journals, magazines, and internet resources. Some anthropological literatures have also been reviewed to evaluate the interconnectedness and interpretative issues between Buddha's views on values and ethics in culture under the domain of and philosophical anthropology.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. *The domain of Ethics and Human values: An Overview in Philosophical Anthropology*

The 'ethics' and 'values' are two important issues of understanding culture from anthropological perspective. But, it is important to mention that the 'ethics' should not be considered as synonymous of the two other important as well as pertinent terms 'norms' and 'customs' in anthropology. According to anthropologists, value is the only thing to guide human behavior in the society. Values are the standards by which members of a society (human) define what is good or bad, holy or unholy, beautiful or ugly (the guiding principle in the sharp dual mode of situation) Values are assumptions that are widely shared within the society. They are a central aspect of the nonmaterial culture of a society and are important because they influence/guides behavior of man as the member of a society. (Scupin, 2000).

Similarly, norms, the society's rules of right and wrong behavior which rules side by side with ethics. Norms are shared rules or guidelines that define how people "ought" to behave under certain circumstances. Norms are generally connected to the values, beliefs, worldviews, and ideologies of a society which ultimately shape the ethical issues of human behavior (or culture) in the society. Therefore, we may say that the ultimate goal of the societal norms and values in culture is the ethics of human behavior. 'Ethics', the term concerned with what is morally good and bad and morally right and wrong. The term is also applied to any system (normative behaviors) of moral values or principles. Ethics, therefore, deals with such domain at all levels of behavior or culture. Its subject consists of the fundamental issues of practical decision making, and its major concerns include the nature of ultimate value and the standards by which human actions can be judged right or wrong.

Philosophical anthropology attempts to define and understand what it means to be human from the perspective of ideal norms and values of for being an ethical domain in society and culture. Hence, the alternative way of thinking of the domain is Anthropological philosophy. Since its development in the 1920s in Germany, Philosophical Anthropology has been turned into philosophical discipline, competing with other traditional sub disciples of philosophy (e.g. epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, logic, and aesthetics). It is an attempt to unify disparate ways of understanding behavior of humans (interactions and interrelationships as both creatures of their social environments and creatures of their own values. Philosophical anthropology is emerged with the philosophical explorations of human nature and the human condition.

Philosophical Anthropologists conceive in contemporary terms, philosophical thought might come within its purview only as an element in the culture of some society that is under study, but it would be very unlikely to, have any part to play in an anthropologist's work or in the way human nature are conceived for the purposes of that work. Philosophical anthropology is an area of philosophy as well as a subfield of Cultural Anthropology that seeks to understand the nature, or essence of human beings under the guidance of normative values of the society what knowledge human beings are reasonably expected to have and act upon in an ethical domain.

Ethics play the role of flag bearer of norms and values, the two sorts of ideas that members of a culture might share. Norms are the ideas members of a culture share about the way things ought to be done. Values are shared ideas about what is true, right, and beautiful that underlies cultural patterns and guide society in response to the physical and social environment. Human behavior is not always consistent with cultural norms or values, and on this very issue ethics play it's applied role through religious ideas, beliefs and doctrines as propagated in cross-culturally (Nanda & Warms, 2002)

Thus, regarding the norms, values and ethical issues and their domain in Cultural Anthropology, it is implied that ethics is one of the informed and applied areas or fields of Philosophical Anthropology in specific. And from this perspective, ethics is considered as one of the applications of value loaded social and cultural human which informs moral debates, human rights, and dignity. Moreover, the ethics here is culture-bound and the core identity of an ethical approach as taken in anthropological philosophy. Hence, along with the ethics, epistemology, metaphysics and logic, philosophical anthropologists view that ethics

should be the part and parcel of human nature as a supremo having culture when typical norms and values (moral codes and conducts) are the guiding principles of its smooth running with the philosophy of life and culture to maintain the fundamentals of humanity cross-culturally (Padhi, 2016).

But it is a mentionable fact that anthropological interest in morality has united recently been dominated by the theme of collective rules and norms, seen either as bulwarks for socio-cultural solidarity or as evidence irreducible cross-cultural variations, the relativistic ideas of different cultures each embodying a taken for granted moral philosophy. In all this, morality has tended to collapse into society and culture more generally and to be equated with adherence to rules or norms or customs. By contrast, recent writings under the rubric of anthropology of ethics have begun from the conviction that when people pursue, or act in the light of conceptions of human excellence or the good, certain distinctive things (reflective thought also) are going on which are not explainable in terms of collective norms and (e.g. emergence of a charismatic or religious leader) which prevalent conceptions of society and culture cannot readily capture (Bernard & Spencer, 2010).

3.2. *Buddhism in the light of Anthropology: A Brief Outline*

Buddhism is a missionary salvation religion, first taught by the *Gautama Buddha* (‘the Enlightened One’) in the North Indian Gangetic plain in the sixth and early fifth centuries BC. The *Buddha* came from the edge of the Brahmanic society of his day, and he reacted both against the ritualist exclusivism of *Brahmin* religion and the extreme ascetism practiced by renouces who followed Jainism (Gombrich, 1988).

It began as a form of humanistic religions individualism: each person’s salvation lay within their own grasp, regardless of background or sex. Salvation in Buddhism means the attainment of nirvana through overcoming desire. Achieving this required a long training and devotion as well as meditation and before that the accumulation of spiritual merit and skill (as won by moral actions and supporting Buddhist clerics); and this accumulation was presumed to take many lives. It is also a mentionable truth that Buddhism shares with Hinduism the doctrine of reincarnation according to one’s actions. Thus, traditional Buddhism was egalitarian only in the sense of believing, in spiritual equality of opportunity. The closest Buddhism came to propagating the notion of a community of equal believers was the early idea that all monks were equal strivers, hence a way of keeping solidarity in norms and values of life style by the cultural anthropologists.

Moreover, in modern times a new form of Buddhism has arisen which does assert the equality of all believers. The followers attend meditation centers, not to monasteries and reject the spiritual leadership of monks. They understand Buddhism to encompass social reform, social work and socialism, too which are the vital areas of studying religion cross-culturally from anthropological perspective. The followers also see Buddhism as a national ‘philosophy’ under the influence of nineteenth-century European thought (Gellner, 1990).

Today, Anthropologists can classify Buddhism according to the country-based contextual categories like, Theravada, found in Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Sri Lanka, and the Mahayana found in Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, Vietnam and Japan. Both have missionary offshoots in many other parts of the world.

Regarding the availability of literatures, it has been found that until the 1980s there was little substantial anthropological work on *Mahayana* Buddhism, though more has now begun to be published (Mumford, 1989; Gellner 1992; Samuel 1993.). For some reasons as observed by Gellner (1990), it was *Theravada* Buddhism which first attracted a very large amount of extremely high-quality scholarship this (Nash, 1966; Tambiah, 1970; Gombrich, 1971; Spiro, 1971; Keyes, 1977).

Therefore, at its initial domain, anthropological enquiries on Buddhism attempted to answer a number of interconnected questions all ultimately focused on the area of understanding Buddhism as a religious system, and this system has to be understood through the typical lens of anthropological ethnographies. The following may be the issues or micro areas of inquiries:

- a. The relationship between the worship of the Buddha and the cult of spirits or gods whom *Theravada* Buddhists worship for worldly ends.
- b. The role of Buddhism in accepting the total responsibility for their actions and future lives.
- c. The justifications of their performing rituals for the benefit of dead relatives.
- d. The nature and cause of Buddhists’ belief when they worship the Buddha.
- e. Buddhists’ attainment of *Nirvana*.

- f. The reality of understanding the simple rituals of *Theravada* Buddhism as the aids to the generation of good intentions or its magical effect, if any as perceived.
- g. The differences of monk's view of Buddhism and the laity's.
- h. The cause of motivation on people to become monks or nuns.
- i. The supportive issues (if any) of Sangha as received by laity.

3.3. *Universal Ethics and Human Cultural Values through the Teachings of Buddha – Some Observations*

Buddhism arose as a protest against Hinduism, especially caste inequality, but it retained and revised several Hindu concepts such as Karma. In Buddhism, everyone has the potential through good deeds to achieve a better rebirth with each incarnation, until finally, release from *samsara* (the life cycle, reincarnation, death, rebirth, and doom) is achieved. Compassion toward others, including animals, is a key virtue. Branches of Buddhism have different texts that they consider their canon. Buddhism in association with a strong tradition of monasticism through which monks and nuns renounce the everyday world and spend their lives meditating and doing good works. Buddhists have many annual festivals and rituals. Some events bring pilgrims from around the world to northern India to visit Sarnath, where the Buddha gave his first teaching, and Gaya, where he gained enlightenments (Miller, 2011).

Most anthropologists of the time line academics would accept the broad conception of culture as a shared way of life that includes values, beliefs, and norms' transmission within a particular society from generation to generation. In particular values are the standards by which members of a society define what is good, bad, holy or unholy, beautiful or ugly. They are assumptions that are widely shared within the society values are a central as well as the mainstay of the nonmaterial (e.g. supernatural / religious) Culture of a society and are mostly important because they influence the behavior of the members of a society (Scupin, 2000; Nanda & Warmas, 2002; Miller, 2011). Nonmaterial (e.g. supernatural/religious) culture of a society and are mostly important because they influence the behavior of the members of a society (Scupin, 2000; Nanda & Warmas 2002; Miller 2011)

It is worth mentioning that Buddhism originated in a founding figure, Siddhartha Gautama (ca. 566-486 BCE), revered as the Buddha, or 'Awakened One' (Eckel, 1995) It began in northern India, where the Buddha was born and grew up. From there it spread throughout the subcontinent, into inner Asia and China, to Sri Lanka, and on to Southeast area. Over the past 200 years Buddhism has spread to Europe and North America.

It is found that Buddhism has a great diversity of doctrine and practice, to the extent that it is difficult to point to a single essential feature other than the importance of *Gautama Buddha*. Buddha sought to evolve and propagate a social code (of ethical values) to everyone irrespective of social, economic as well as political strata. The democratic spirit as introduced in society by Buddha served as a serious blow to ideas of monarchy creeping into the *ganatantras* (republics). The concepts and ideas of man, mind, perceptions values, and society (*sangha*), unity and equality under ethics came alive and were blended harmoniously. Their uniqueness grew in strength and became to participate in socio-cultural action guided by values and ethics as ideal for the cultural anthropologists as well as anthropological philosophizes.

The typical action plan of Buddha was derived from the practical struggles in life, in all spheres of culture and he preached three principles namely intelligence, compassion and equality. The teaching of the Buddha can bring about socialism (i.e., ideal values in keeping in touch with society) through a blood less revolution and he saw the women as equal to the men as perceived by the anthropologists studying on gender equity on equality (Eller, 2009; Kottak, 2000; Haviland et al., 2008). Hence, the values have major influence on a person's behavior and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations as per the application of the philosophical anthropology.

Buddha has developed *Dhammapada* which shapes the personality of man in the crucible of experience as conceived by the 'Culture & Personality School' of Anthropology. Here, personality is conceived as an individual's patterned and characteristic to way of behaving, thinking, and feeling (Mead, 1961). It is all comprehensive, covering society, environment, individuality, the five senses of organs, mind, joys and sorrows high and low, and right path and peace, all of which are examined in depth. It also commemorates the holistic view of anthropologists while studying human as bio-cultural settings from all of its levels. It is also characterized by noble, thoughts, natural laws, rules of ethics and humanist approaches. *Dhammapada* promotes human values and ethics like anthropological philosophy. What the Buddha calls *Dhamma* differs fundamentally from what is called religion. Religion is related to

the personal belief in supernatural (gods & goddess or something else) and *Dhamma*, as called by Buddha is to practice.

Buddha studied human problems and experience like happiness and sorrow, death and endless conflict between the different phenomena. He positively conceptualized his *dharmā* (religion) as not pessimistic but enabling one to remove sorrow after recognizing its existence. He introduced the idea of placing a higher value on morality and equality of people instead of on which family or caste people is form into. It has encouraged equality of social opportunity but without frantic economic competition. With this regard the motives of social and psychological functions of religion as anthropologists viewed are the same one that of Buddha's (Ferraro & Andreatta, 2017; Nanda & Warms, 2002).

Buddha developed four Noble Truths (*Satyas*), and the Eightfold Paths (*Astammarg*) to promote ethics and human values, and also tried to eradicate mental or perceptual; physical and social shortcomings. Moreover, Buddhist philosophy inculcates values like political and social democratic values, universal brotherhood, controlling senses, practical thinking, self-satisfaction and scientific behavior in the classless society (Kanaparthy & Rani, 2017).

The Four Noble Truths are the following:

- (i) ***Dukkha***: The truth of suffering
- (ii) ***Samredaya***: The truth of the cause of suffering
- (iii) ***Nimodha***: The truth of the end of
- (iv) ***Magga***: The truth of the path that frees us from sufferings

In this context it may be concluded that in the Four Noble Truth, Buddha as physician prescribes the treatment for our illness, in the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path of Buddhism is the means by which enlightenment may be realized. And most of the Buddha's teaching on universal ethics and human socio-cultural values deals with some part of this Path. The Eightfold Path concerns the following:

1. **Right View & Right Understanding**, insight into the true nature of reality.
2. **Right intention**, the unselfish desire to realize enlightenments.
3. **Right speech**, using speech compassionately.
4. **Right Action**, ethical conduct, manifesting compassion.
5. **Right Livelihood**, making living through ethical and non-harmful means.
6. **Right Effort**, cultivating wholesome qualities; releasing unwholesome qualities.
7. **Right Mindfulness**, whole body and - mind awareness.
8. **Right Concentration**, meditation or some other dedicated, concentrated practice.

The word translated as "right" is *sambyanc* (Sanskrit) & *sammaya* (Pali), which means "wise", "wholesome", "skillful", "ideal". The word "right" should not be taken as a commandment, as in "do this, or you are wrong". It is the positive value loaded instruction.

The Eight-fold Path is the fourth Truth of the Four Noble Truths. It is also important to understand that these eight areas of practice of practice are not separate steps to master one at a time; the practice of each part of the Path supports the other parts. The Path is divided into three main sections: wisdom, ethical conduit and mental discipline.

4. Conclusions

Therefore, we can conclude that *Gautama Buddha* was not only a prophet, ancient Indian philosopher and spiritual leader, but also a social revolutionist, social reformer, democratic political leader, and teacher of the application of topical sociocultural values and ethical issues in lifetime He was the greatest philosopher in the fields of morality, individual values and universal brotherhood. The students in the domain of cultural anthropology can suggest that every man should study Buddha's teachings which liberate and enlighten man to live his life in a harmonious way in cross-culture relativistic norms and values.

But, there has also been debate on the extent to which Buddhism can be said to have provided a theory of state. In the 1980s anthropologists increasingly turned their attention to the role of Buddhist institutions, doctrines, and personnel in the development of nationalism and the eradication of political violence. Thus, we may wait for an era of applied Buddhism for the issues from the end of modern Cultural Anthropology.

A venture must be expected where the practice of incorporating Buddhist teaching of values and ethics into daily life without the need to convert adhere to religious rituals, beliefs or conversion from the cultural as well as philosophical anthropological perspective to order to increase its relevance and faith globally in the spheres of well-being science, ethics and profession.

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