

The Importance of the *Suttapiṭaka* in Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the *Suttapiṭaka*, the central repository of the Buddha's discourses, within the broader framework of the *Tipiṭaka*, the canonical foundation of Buddhism. As the primary source of the Buddha's ethical, philosophical, meditative, and social teachings, the *Suttapiṭaka* preserves the earliest and most authentic record of his teachings on the Dhamma. The study explores the historical origins and compilation of the *Suttapiṭaka*, its internal structure across the five *Nikāyas*, and its linguistic and literary characteristics. Special attention is given to the major doctrinal themes presented in the suttas—including the Four Noble Truths, dependent origination, moral discipline, and early Buddhist psychology—which collectively illuminate the intellectual depth and coherence of the Buddha's teachings. In addition, the research highlights the relevance of the *Suttapiṭaka* for contemporary society by examining its enduring impact on ethical reasoning, social equality, and modern Buddhist thought, including Ambedkarite interpretations. By employing historical, analytical, and philosophical methodologies, the paper argues that the *Suttapiṭaka* embodies the living essence of Buddhist tradition. Its teachings continue to provide a foundational framework for understanding Buddhist ethics, spiritual practice, and social philosophy, thereby demonstrating its significance in both ancient and modern contexts.

KEYWORDS: *Suttapiṭaka*; *Tipiṭaka*; Buddhist canon; *Nikāyas*; Buddhist ethics; Four Noble Truths; Dependent Origination; meditation; Pāli literature; social philosophy; Ambedkarite Buddhism; compassion; non-violence; Buddhist thought; Buddhist textual studies.

INTRODUCTION

The philosophical and ethical foundation of Buddhist Dhamma is rooted in the sacred canonical collection known as the *Tipiṭaka*. The *Tipiṭaka*—comprising the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, the *Sutta Piṭaka*, and the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*—is regarded as the primary structural framework of Buddhism. Among these three, the *Suttapiṭaka* offers profound guidance on Buddhist philosophy, ethics, meditation, social order, and the path to liberation. It preserves the authentic record of the Buddha's direct discourses as well as his dialogues with disciples[1].

The Buddha instructed his followers: “After my passing, let the Dhamma and the Vinaya be your teacher[2]. This declaration underlines the centrality of the *Suttapiṭaka*, for the true meaning and practice of the Dhamma becomes evident through the suttas. Thus, the *Suttapiṭaka* may rightly be understood as the living essence of Buddhist tradition.

A. **Meaning and Definition of the *Suttapiṭaka*:** The Pāli word *sutta* is a linguistic derivative of the Sanskrit term *sūtra*, meaning a guiding thread, instruction, or discursive teaching. The word *piṭaka* literally means a “basket” or “collection.” Hence, the term *Suttapiṭaka* may be defined as the collected body of the Buddha's discourses. The *Suttapiṭaka* contains teachings delivered by the Buddha on various occasions, normative instructions to monks, and ethical guidance for householders. It is not merely a religious scripture; it is a comprehensive social, philosophical, and psychological treatise. The suttas provide a practical analysis of the nature of suffering, its causes, and the path leading to freedom from suffering[3].

B. **Brief Introduction to the *Tipiṭaka*:** The *Tipiṭaka* constitutes the foundational scriptural tradition of Buddhism and is traditionally divided into three major parts:

- i) **Vinayapiṭaka** – Regulations for monastic discipline, codes of conduct for monks and nuns, and the administrative structure of the Saṅgha.
- ii) **Suttapiṭaka** – Discourses, dialogues, moral narratives, and doctrinal teachings of the Buddha.

- iii) **Abhidhamma Piṭaka** – Analytical, philosophical, and psychological exposition of mental and material phenomena. Among these, the *Suttapiṭaka* is most closely connected with the general populace; it represents the popular and instructional dimension of Buddhist Dhamma [4].
- C. **Origin of the Suttapiṭaka:** After the Buddha's *parinibbāna*, his teachings were orally recited and preserved. At the First Buddhist Council held at Rājagaha under the leadership of Mahākassapa Thera, the *Vinaya* was recited by Upāli, and the *Suttapiṭaka* by Ānanda, who had been the Buddha's personal attendant and possessed an extraordinary memory [5]. In subsequent councils, these teachings were systematically arranged and classified. Consequently, the *Suttapiṭaka* is regarded as an ancient and highly authentic body of early Buddhist literature.
- D. **Structure of the Nikāyas :** The *Suttapiṭaka* is divided into five Nikāyas:
1. **Dīgha Nikāya** – Collection of long discourses (34 suttas).
 2. **Majjhima Nikāya** – Collection of middle-length discourses (152 suttas).
 3. **Saṃyutta Nikāya** – Thematically arranged discourses.
 4. **Aṅguttara Nikāya** – Numerically classified teachings.
 5. **Khuddaka Nikāya** – Collection of shorter texts, including the *Dhammapada*, *Udāna*, *Suttanipāta*, and others. Together, these Nikāyas offer a holistic view of the Buddha's teachings—covering conduct, practical ethics, philosophical thought, social guidance, meditation, and the path to liberation [6].
- E. **Need and Objectives of the Research:** In contemporary society, religious texts must be examined not only from a spiritual standpoint but also from social and ethical perspectives. The *Suttapiṭaka* embodies a philosophy grounded in humanity, equality, non-violence, and compassion—values that resonate strongly in the modern global context. Accordingly, the objectives of this research are as follows:
1. To explore the central position of the *Suttapiṭaka* within Buddhist Dhamma.
 2. To analyse its philosophical and social ideas.
 3. To evaluate the contemporary relevance of the teachings found in the *Suttapiṭaka*.
 4. To study the interrelationship between Buddhist philosophy and Ambedkarite thought[7].
- F. **Research Methodology:** This study employs historical, analytical, and philosophical methodologies. Primary sources such as the original Pāli sutta texts and their commentaries (*Aṭṭhakathā*) have been consulted, along with contemporary Marathi and English scholarly works. Additionally, the writings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the contributions of Bhikkhu Bodhananda, and research linked to the Nālandā and Takṣaśilā traditions are used as contextual sources[8].
- G. **The Theological Position of the Suttapiṭaka:** In the Buddhist tradition, *Dhamma* signifies “moral principle, truth, or the path of conduct.” The essence of this Dhamma is rooted in the suttas. Therefore, the *Suttapiṭaka* is not merely a doctrinal text; it is a science of life. The Buddha emphasised experiential knowledge, and this emphasis permeates every discourse in the *Suttapiṭaka*. His message “*Appo Deepo Bhava*”—*Be a light unto yourself*—embodies the spirit of self-reliance that lies at the heart of the suttas[9].

Thus, the *Suttapiṭaka* is the heart of Buddhist Dhamma. It contains the Buddha's living teachings, ethical vision, social welfare concerns, and the path to liberation. The social, moral, and philosophical foundations of Buddhism rest upon this textual corpus. Understanding Buddhism is impossible without a deep study of the *Suttapiṭaka*. In the subsequent chapters, the structure, philosophy, social ethics, and contemporary relevance of the *Suttapiṭaka* will be examined in detail.

1. **The Structure and Divisions of the Sutta Piṭaka:** The Sutta Piṭaka is the most extensive and doctrinally rich collection within the Buddhist canon. It is regarded as the living testimony of the Dhamma, for it preserves the

direct discourses of the Buddha. While the Vinaya Piṭaka outlines monastic discipline and regulations, the Sutta Piṭaka conveys the Buddha's insights into human consciousness, moral values, and philosophical reflection. Its structure is remarkably vast, encompassing all spheres of human life—religious, ethical, social, educational, and metaphysical[10].

- A. Historical Background of the Sutta Piṭaka:** Following the Buddha's Parinirvāṇa, his teachings were orally preserved through collective recitation. During the First Buddhist Council held at Rājagaha, the Venerable Ānanda recited the Buddha's discourses from memory, thereby establishing the foundational corpus of the Sutta Piṭaka [11]. His exceptional memory and integrity earned him the title *dharmabhaṇḍāgārika*—"the treasurer of the Dhamma."

Subsequently, at the Second Council (Vaishali) and the Third Council (Pāṭaliputra), these discourses were further organised, classified, and clarified according to thematic content. During the Fourth Council in Sri Lanka, the entire Sutta Piṭaka was formally written down in the Pāli language. This transition from oral tradition to written scripture ensured the preservation and transmission of the Buddha's teachings across centuries and cultures.

- B. Composition and Internal Structure of the Sutta Piṭaka:** The entire body of the Sutta Piṭaka is classified into **five** Nikāyas. These five Nikāyas constitute the canonical structure of the Sutta Piṭaka, each containing discourses (*suttas*) tailored to specific themes, contexts, and audiences[12].

- 1. The Dīgha Nikāya:** The term *dīgha* means "long," and this Nikāya contains lengthy discourses and extended dialogues. It consists of 34 suttas, grouped into three sections: Sīlakkhandha Vagga; Mahā Vagga; Pāthika Vagga

Important Suttas: **Sāmaññaphala Sutta** – explaining the spiritual fruits of a disciplined life. **Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** – detailing the final days and passing of the Buddha. **Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta** – outlining the four foundations of mindfulness. These discourses consist of dialogues between the Buddha and kings, Brahmins, householders, and monks, offering valuable insights into contemporary social structures and the Buddha's pragmatic engagement with society [13].

- 2. The Majjhima Nikāya:** The term *majjhima* refers to "middle-length discourses." This Nikāya contains 152 suttas, arranged in three divisions: Mūlapaṇṇāsa; Majjhimapaṇṇāsa; Uparipaṇṇāsa

Important Suttas: **Sabbāsava Sutta** – explaining methods for eliminating defilements. **Cittasaṅkilesa Sutta** – on purification of the mind and the importance of moral conduct. **Rathavinīta Sutta** – illustrating the sequential stages of spiritual practice. The Majjhima Nikāya represents the psychological dimension of the Sutta Piṭaka, presenting nuanced analyses of mental states, meditation techniques, and discipline of self-cultivation[14].

- 3. The Saṃyutta Nikāya :** The word *saṃyutta* means "connected" or "thematically grouped discourses." The Nikāya is divided into **56 saṃyuttas** (groups), each containing numerous discourses centred on a particular theme.

Examples of Major Saṃyuttas: **Devatā Saṃyutta** – discourses with celestial beings. **Khandha Saṃyutta** – analytical exposition of the five aggregates. **Sacca Saṃyutta** – explaining the Four Noble Truths. **Vedanā Saṃyutta** – on the nature of feeling. **Nidāna Saṃyutta** – elucidation of dependent origination. The Saṃyutta Nikāya constitutes the doctrinal core of Buddhist thought, presenting an in-depth examination of existential structure and causal analysis[15].

- 4. The Aṅguttara Nikāya:** The term *aṅguttara* means "increasing by one," referring to its numerical arrangement. Teachings are classified progressively based on numerical categories—ones, twos, threes, and so forth.

Examples: **Ekakanipāṭa** (Book of Ones) – discourses focused on a single principle (e.g., restraint). **Dukanipāṭa (Book of Twos)** – teachings in pairs (e.g., moral virtue and concentration). **Tikanipāṭa (Book of Threes)** – sets of three principles (e.g., the threefold training: sīla, samādhi, paññā). The Aṅguttara Nikāya is noted for its practical ethical orientation and serves as a handbook for both monastics and lay practitioners [16].

5. The Khuddaka Nikāya: The term *khuddaka* means “minor” or “miscellaneous.” However, this Nikāya is one of the richest sections of the canon, containing numerous shorter texts: Dhammapada; Udāna; Itivuttaka; Sutta Nipāta; Theragāthā and Therīgāthā; Jātaka; Buddhavaṃsa; Cariyāpiṭaka

Important Texts: **Dhammapada** – 423 verses on ethics and self-cultivation. **Sutta Nipāta** – among the oldest and most poetic collections. **Theragāthā / Therīgāthā** – verses of enlightened monks and nuns. **Jātaka Tales** – moral stories from the Buddha’s previous births. The Khuddaka Nikāya is deeply intertwined with popular religious culture and has been instrumental in spreading the Dhamma among the masses [17].

1. **Linguistic and Literary Features of the Sutta Piṭaka:** The language of the Sutta Piṭaka is **Pāli**, a vernacular medium that was intelligible to the common people. By choosing Pāli over Sanskrit, the Buddha made the Dhamma accessible to all. The style is simple, conversational, and often poetic. The suttas employ parables, similes, and everyday examples to explain profound concepts.

For example, in one metaphor, the Buddha says: “*Just as one leaves the raft behind after crossing the river, so too should one abandon even the teachings after attaining liberation.*”[18] Such metaphorical clarity exemplifies the literary elegance of the Sutta Piṭaka.

- **Thematic Diversity within the Sutta Piṭaka:** The Sutta Piṭaka deals with virtually every dimension of human life: Doctrinal: The Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, dependent origination.
- **Ethical:** Morality, compassion, restraint, non-violence.
- **Psychological:** Mental processes, meditation, emotions, wisdom.
- **Social:** Equality, gender justice, caste-free society.
- **Political:** Ethical kingship, abolition of slavery, principles of just governance. Thus, the Sutta Piṭaka serves not only as a religious scripture but also as an encyclopedia of human experience [19].

2. **Traditional Study of the Sutta Piṭaka:** In the Theravāda tradition, recitation and contemplation of the Sutta Piṭaka remain integral to monastic life. On every full-moon day, monks recite the *Pātimokkha* along with selected suttas. In Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and modern Navayāna Buddhist communities in India, these texts form the foundation of Dhamma education.

Buddhaghosa, in his commentaries such as the *Sumangalavilāsinī*, has offered elaborate exegetical interpretations of numerous suttas [20].

3. **Relationship Between the Sutta Piṭaka and Buddhist Philosophy:** The Sutta Piṭaka serves as the foundational source for the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. The Abhidhamma’s analytical and psychological doctrines are extensions of ideas first presented in the suttas. Concepts such as the three characteristics (impermanence, suffering, non-self), the Middle Way, and the path of liberation all originate in the sutta teachings [21].

Thus, the structure of the *Sutta Piṭaka* reflects the breadth and inclusiveness of Buddhist doctrine. Each Nikāya offers a unique lens through which to understand the Dhamma:

- The **Dīgha Nikāya** presents social dialogues.
- The **Majjhima Nikāya** guides the practitioner.
- The **Saṃyutta Nikāya** expounds philosophy.
- The **Aṅguttara Nikāya** develops ethical principles.
- The **Khuddaka Nikāya** connects the canon with the lived experiences of ordinary people. The Sutta Piṭaka stands as the living embodiment of the Buddha’s words and the soul of Buddhist tradition. Its structural richness underscores its indispensable role in shaping Buddhist doctrine, practice, and culture.

4. Buddhist Philosophy in the *Sutta Piṭaka* : The *Sutta Piṭaka* is not merely a compilation of religious discourses; it constitutes a living embodiment of Buddhist philosophy. The Buddha's teachings are free from divine mysticism. They are experiential, rational, and grounded in practical human life. The philosophical vision of the *Sutta Piṭaka* provides a pragmatic path for understanding human suffering and attaining liberation. For this reason, Buddhist philosophy is designated as "**Dhamma**"—a term that signifies truth, natural law, and ethical conduct.

Here, the major philosophical doctrines articulated in the *Sutta Piṭaka* are examined. They are: The Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*), Karma and Rebirth, and The Middle Path and the Threefold Training.

A. The Four Noble Truths : The foundation of the Buddha's philosophy rests upon the "*Four Noble Truths*", which are explained at several places in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, most prominently in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*[22].

The Four Noble Truths are: The Truth of Suffering (*dukkha*) – Life is characterised by suffering. The Truth of the Origin of Suffering (*dukkhasamudaya*) – Craving (*taṇhā*) is the cause of suffering. The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (*dukkhanirodha*) – With the cessation of craving, suffering comes to an end. The Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā*) – The Noble Eightfold Path.

a)**The First Noble Truth: Dukkha:** The *Sutta Piṭaka* states: "*jāti-pi dukkhā, jarā-pi dukkhā, vyādhi-pi dukkhā, maraṇam-pi dukkham*" (Birth, aging, illness, death, separation from the loved, association with the disliked, and unfulfilled desires are all forms of suffering.) The Buddha interprets suffering not with pessimism but with realism. His aim is diagnostic clarity grounded in human experience.

b)**The Second Noble Truth: Samudaya:** According to this truth, the root cause of suffering is **craving** (*taṇhā*). The *Sutta Piṭaka* states: "*yāya taṇhāya punappunam saṃsāram nayati, sā taṇhā dukkhasamudayo*" (That craving which leads beings again and again through *saṃsāra*—this craving is the origin of suffering.)[23] Craving manifests as sensual desire, attachment to existence, and fear of non-existence.

c)**The Third Noble Truth: Nirodha:** The Buddha teaches: "*taṇhāyā nirodho nibbānam*" "The cessation of craving is Nibbāna." [24] Nibbāna is described as peace, freedom from attachment, and the highest unconditioned happiness.

d)**The Fourth Noble Truth: The Path:** Liberation from suffering is achieved through the *Noble Eightfold Path*, which is structured around moral discipline (*sīla*), mental concentration (*saṃādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). The path consists of: Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*); Right Intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*); Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*); Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*); Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*); Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*); Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*); Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*). This path constitutes the ethical and psychological core of Buddhist life.

B. Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) : The second fundamental doctrine is *Dependent Origination*, one of the most profound and philosophically rigorous teachings of the *Sutta Piṭaka*. It is extensively discussed in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* [25]. Its canonical formulation is: "*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti; imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti*" (When this exists, that arises; when this ceases, that ceases.)[26].

The twelve-linked chain of becoming comprises: Avidyā → Saṃskāra → Vijñāna → Nāmarūpa → Saḷāyatana → Phassa → Vedanā → Taṇhā → Upādāna → Bhava → Jāti → Jarāmaraṇa. This chain reveals that *saṃsāric* existence begins with ignorance and ends through knowledge.

Ethical Implications: Dependent Origination demonstrates that nothing exists independently; everything arises through relational conditions. This insight undermines egoistic notions of “I” and “mine.” Thus, *Paṭiccasamuppāda* becomes the philosophical basis for *anattā* (non-self) and *aniccā* (impermanence).

C. Karma and Rebirth: The doctrine of karma in the Sutta Piṭaka is practical and ethical. The Buddha states: “*cittaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi*” (Monks, I say that intention is karma.)[27]. Karma refers to the intentional action of body, speech, and mind. Good actions yield well-being; harmful actions produce suffering. Karma is not divine judgment but moral causation.

Rebirth: According to the Buddha, the flow of mental processes continues into a new existence through karmic momentum. The expression “*na ca taṃ so, na ca añño*”⁸ (“Not the same, yet not entirely different”), explains the continuity-without-identity in rebirth, often compared to a flame passing from one lamp to another. This interpretation makes karma and rebirth philosophically coherent and psychologically meaningful.

D. The Middle Path (Majjhima Paṭipadā): The Sutta Piṭaka emphasises avoiding extremes of sensual indulgence and severe asceticism. The Buddha declares: “*dve me bhikkhave ante anupagamma... majjhima paṭipadā*” (Without approaching either of these two extremes, the Middle Path arises.)[28]. The Middle Path harmonises *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. It promotes moral refinement, cognitive clarity, and mental equilibrium.

Sīla (Morality) : Sīla pertains to purity of speech, action, and livelihood. The *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* describes twenty-two virtues associated with moral discipline [29].

Samādhi (Concentration) : The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* explains the four foundations of mindfulness: contemplation of body, feelings, mind, and dhammas. Through this practice, mental defilements are eliminated [30].

Paññā (Wisdom) : Wisdom signifies insight into reality. The Sutta Piṭaka states: “*Yo dhammaṃ passati so maṃ passati*” (He who sees the Dhamma sees me.)[31]. Thus, the Buddha is known not through devotion but through the realisation of truth.

The Three Marks of Existence (Tilakkhaṇa) : The Sutta Piṭaka teaches three universal characteristics of all phenomena: Impermanence (*aniccā*) ;Suffering (*dukkha*) ;Non-self (*anattā*). These are elaborated in texts such as the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*[32]. The three marks constitute the empirical and analytical foundation of Buddhist philosophy.

E. Ethical and Social Philosophy in the Sutta Piṭaka: The Sutta Piṭaka’s philosophical vision extends beyond individual liberation to social equality and human dignity. In the *Vasettha Sutta*, the Buddha affirms: “*jātinā joṭi karaṇaṃ, dhammo joṭi karaṇaṃ*” (A person becomes noble by conduct, not by birth.)[33]. Thus, Buddhist philosophy assumes the form of a social critique grounded in ethics, compassion, and justice.

F. Summary of Philosophical Features

Doctrine	Articulation in the Sutta Piṭaka	Implication
Four Noble Truths	Analytical diagnosis of suffering	Path of inner transformation
Dependent Origination	Doctrine of conditioned causality	Liberation through overcoming ignorance
Karma Theory	Ethical responsibility	Self-determination
Middle Path	Balanced lifestyle	Integration of morality, concentration, and wisdom
Three Marks of Existence	Impermanence, suffering, non-self	Dissolution of ego, attainment of peace

Thus, the philosophy of the *Sutta Piṭaka* is experiential, scientific in method, and profoundly humanistic. It rejects theism, superstition, and fear-based ritualism. Instead, it advocates a practical discipline centred on thought, conduct, and insight. The Four Noble Truths diagnose suffering; Dependent Origination explains its causal structure; the doctrine of karma instils ethical responsibility; and the Middle Path provides a workable route to liberation. For these reasons, the *Sutta Piṭaka* stands as the living source of Buddhist philosophical inquiry—embodying the compassion and wisdom of the Buddha himself.

2. **Ethics and Moral Values in the *Sutta Piṭaka*:** The *Sutta Piṭaka* is the primary source of Buddhist ethics. The Buddha consistently taught that *Dhamma* is not merely ritual observance, but a disciplined code of conduct grounded in moral behaviour and inner purity[34]. In his teachings, the ethical framework is experiential rather than metaphysical; it is rooted in the transformation of the human mind. From this perspective, the *Sutta Piṭaka* articulates an ethical worldview based on the cultivation of compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), and wisdom (*paññā*)[35].

- A. ***The Philosophical Foundations of Buddhist Ethics:*** Buddhist ethics rests upon self-discipline and self-transformation. The Buddha summarised the essence of moral life in a threefold formula: “To avoid all evil, to cultivate the good, and to purify one’s mind, this is the teaching of the Buddhas [36]. These three principles, i.e. abstaining from unwholesome actions, developing wholesome qualities, and cultivating mental purity, form the foundation of Buddhist ethical thought.
- B. ***Social Ethics in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*:*** The *Sigālovāda Sutta* (Dīgha Nikāya 31) is considered the most comprehensive exposition of Buddhist social ethics. In this discourse, the Buddha instructs a young layman that the true meaning of “worshipping the six directions” lies in fulfilling one’s responsibilities towards six social relationships i.e. parents, teachers, spouses, friends, workers, and monastics.[37]. Through these guidelines, the *Sutta* illustrates the duty-centred nature of Buddhist ethical life.
- C. ***The Ethics of Compassion in the *Mettā Sutta*:*** In the *Mettā Sutta* (*Sutta Nipāta*), the Buddha proclaims: “*May all beings be happy; may all beings be free from disease.*”[38] This aspiration captures the essence of Buddhist ethics. Loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) extend not only to human beings but to all sentient life. This universal benevolence is a distinctive hallmark of Buddhist ethical thought [39]
- D. ***The Middle Way as Moral Discipline in the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*:*** In his first sermon—the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*—the Buddha emphasises the rejection of two extremes: indulgence in sensual pleasure and self-mortification [39]. The Middle Way (*majjhima paṭipadā*) represents a balanced approach to moral life, grounded in self-restraint, moderation, and wisdom. Thus, the ethical spirit of Buddhism is rooted in equilibrium and rational discernment.
- E. ***Anti-Slavery and Egalitarian Ethics:*** The *Sutta Piṭaka* strongly rejects caste distinctions, slavery, and hereditary hierarchies. In the *Ambattha Sutta* and *Vāseṭṭha Sutta*, the Buddha clearly states: “*Not by birth is one a brahmin; not by birth is one an outcaste* [40]. Moral worth is determined by conduct rather than lineage. At the time, this was a revolutionary ethical standpoint that laid the foundation for social justice in the Buddhist tradition [41].
- F. ***Meditation and Morality:*** Meditation in the *Sutta Piṭaka* is not merely a technique for concentration; it is a transformative process leading to moral purification. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and *Ānāpāna Sutta* describe meditation as a method for observing and purifying the mind [42]. Since moral life is rooted in mental purity, meditation becomes the mechanism through which ethical transformation is realised.
- G. ***Buddhist Ethics and Modern Humanism:*** The ethical principles in the *Sutta Piṭaka* resonate deeply with modern humanistic values. Non-violence, equality, tolerance, and reason-based moral judgment constitute essential moral guidelines for today’s global society[43]. As scholars have observed, “*The Buddha brought religion down to the level of ethics*”, highlighting the profound relevance of the *Sutta Piṭaka* in the contemporary world[44].

Thus, the *Sutta Piṭaka* forms the ethical foundation of Buddhist thought. It harmoniously integrates personal self-discipline, social equality, and universal compassion. The Five Precepts, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Middle Way collectively articulate a moral framework grounded in reason, compassion, and harmony rather than dogma or superstition. Therefore, the *Sutta Piṭaka* stands as a timeless guide for humanity.

3. **The Philosophy of Meditation, *Samādhi*, and the Path to *Nibbāna* in the *Sutta Piṭaka***

In the philosophical tradition of Buddhism, meditation (*bhāvanā*), concentration (*samādhi*), and *nibbāna* (liberation) are interlinked as a triad. The *Sutta Piṭaka* presents these principles not only in a spiritual sense but also in a psychological and practical framework. According to the Buddha, “*Cittam damṭhaṃ subhāveyya*”, that is, only through the purification and stabilisation of the mind does wisdom (*paññā*) arise, and through this wisdom, liberation (*nibbāna*) is attained [45].

In the *Sutta Piṭaka*, meditation is depicted not merely as a spiritual exercise but as a scientific process for the eradication of human suffering, realised concretely within the Noble Eightfold Path under the component of “*Right Concentration*” (*sammā-samādhi*) [46].

A. The Place of Meditation in the Sutta Piṭaka: Meditation is discussed extensively across several suttas, including the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, and *Samyutta Nikāya suttas* [47]. Meditation (*bhāvanā*) is defined as the concentration and mindful observation of the mind. The Buddha emphasised mental purification (*cittapariyodhana*) as the ultimate goal of meditation. A mind that is not purified cannot generate wisdom, and without wisdom, liberation cannot be attained: “*Cittam damṭhaṃ subhāveyya, nipako bhāveyya paṇḍito*” [48].

1. **The Philosophy of Meditation in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta:** The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Majjhima Nikāya 10) is considered the foundational text for meditation. It outlines four types of mindfulness meditation: **Kāyānupassanā** – Observation of the body; **Vedanānupassanā** – Observation of feelings or sensations; **Cittānupassanā** – Observation of mental states; **Dhammānupassanā** – Observation of mental phenomena and principles. Through these methods, the practitioner develops **awareness of experience**, reduces attachment, and cultivates the integrated practice of mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*) [48].

B. The Psychological Aspect of Meditation: In the *Sutta Piṭaka*, meditation is a psychological process of introspection, not esoteric yoga. The Buddha asserts that the mind must be trained (*cittam subhāveyya*) as a prerequisite for wisdom. This mental training parallels modern psychotherapeutic techniques of self-observation. In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the Buddha instructs practitioners to focus on the breath as a means of stabilising the mind, emphasising *mindfulness and observation*. This practice forms the foundation of what modern scholarship identifies as *Mindfulness Meditation* [49].

1. **The Nature and Role of Samādhi:** *Samādhi* is the *concentration of the mind* that ends mental agitation. Within the Eightfold Path, *sammā-samādhi* is the culminating factor, considered the gateway to liberation. The Buddha delineates *four stages of jhāna (meditative absorption)*: **First Jhāna** – Joyful state accompanied by applied and sustained thought; **Second Jhāna** – Inner stability with joy but without discursive thought; **Third Jhāna** – Equanimity and mindful serenity; **Fourth Jhāna** – Perfect equanimity, mindfulness, and clarity. These stages represent successive levels of mental purification. The *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* and *Mahāsapphara Sutta* provide detailed expositions of these four jhānas [50].

C. Meditation and Samādhi in the Eightfold Path: Within the Noble Eightfold Path, meditation and concentration are encapsulated in the components: Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) [51]. The Buddha instructs: “*Satiṃ upaṭṭhāpeyya*”— establish mindfulness, “*Samādhiṃ bhāveyya*”— develop concentration. Through this triad, the practitioner cultivates *Right View* and *Right Intention*, ultimately attaining *nibbāna*. Meditation and concentration are thus not merely mental techniques but instruments on the path to liberation [52].

D. The Philosophy of Nibbāna: *Nibbāna* is the *cessation of suffering, greed, hatred, and delusion*. In the *Sutta Piṭaka*, it is metaphorically described as extinguishing a fire. “*Nibbānaṃ paramam sukhaṃ*”—*Nibbāna is supreme bliss* [53]. *Nibbāna* is not merely a post-mortem state; it is an *experiential liberation in the present moment*. In the

Itivuttaka, the Buddha states: “*The cessation of greed, hatred, and delusion is called nibbāna*”[54]. Thus, nibbāna is complete freedom from mental defilements, not the attainment of an external soul or deity.

E. The Interrelation of Meditation, Samādhi, and Wisdom: Meditation and samādhi are essential for the cultivation of wisdom. Meditation stabilises the mind; samādhi purifies it; and from this purified mind, wisdom arises. This triad corresponds to *Sīla – Samādhi – Paññā* [55]. The Buddha declares in the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*: “*When moral conduct is perfected, concentration arises; when concentration is perfected, wisdom arises*”[56]. Therefore, meditation and samādhi are indispensable practices on the path to nibbāna.

F. The Social Significance of Meditation and Nibbāna: In the *Sutta Piṭaka*, meditation is not limited to personal liberation. It also eradicates greed, hatred, and delusion at the societal level. The Buddha emphasises: “*A purified individual sows the seeds of societal purification*”[57]. Thus, the triad of meditation, concentration, and nibbāna carries revolutionary significance both individually and socially.

Thus, meditation, *samādhi*, and the path to nibbāna form the core of Buddhist philosophy. Meditation (*bhāvanā*) is the training of the mind; samādhi is the stabilisation of consciousness; and nibbāna is the complete liberation of the purified mind. This framework renders Buddhism both psychological and scientific. The *Sutta Piṭaka* presents the path of mental refinement as a method for eradicating suffering and attaining human liberation. “*Cittaṃ damṭhaṃ subhāveyya, nipako bhāveyya paṇḍito*”[58]. Mental refinement is the path to nibbāna, representing the highest principle of Buddhist Dhamma.

4. Social and Humanitarian Perspectives in the Sutta Piṭaka Buddhism is not merely a spiritual or philosophical doctrine; it represents a humanitarian social movement, with the *Sutta Piṭaka* serving as its lifeblood. In the Buddha’s teachings, there is a harmonious integration of social structure, equality, justice, compassion, and non-violence. Many suttas in the *Sutta Piṭaka* are closely connected to the social realities of human life. Therefore, the *Sutta Piṭaka* can be regarded as a guide to social reconstruction. The Buddha states: “*Bahujanahitāya, bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya*”[59]. This means that *Dhamma should exist for the welfare, happiness, and compassion of all beings*. This declaration forms the foundational principle of the *Sutta Piṭaka*’s social and humanitarian outlook [60].

A. The Buddhist View of Society in the Sutta Piṭaka, society is described as an *organisation of interdependent responsibilities*. According to the Buddha, the stability of society is grounded in morality. The *Sigālovamsa Sutta* instructs householders on *responsible and ethical social conduct*, emphasising duties towards parents, teachers, spouse, friends, servants, and monks [61]. This teaching of social responsibility marks the *beginning of Buddhist social ethics*.

B. Principle of Equality in the Sutta Piṭaka: In the *Vasettha Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya*), the Buddha clearly states: “*Na jātayā brāhmaṇo hot, na jātayā hot chandālo. Kammanā brāhmaṇo hot, kammanā hot chandālo*”[63]. This asserts that a person’s worth is determined by actions, not birth. This is a radical challenge to the caste and social hierarchy in Indian society. The *Sutta Piṭaka* consistently rejects caste distinctions and slavery, advocating human equality. This vision anticipates modern concepts of democracy, human rights, and social justice [64].

C. Perspective on Gender Equality: The *Sutta Piṭaka* recognises women as *autonomous individuals with equal spiritual potential*. Examples in the *Therīgāthā*, *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, and *Samyutta Nikāya* demonstrate women attaining wisdom and nibbāna through the *Noble Eightfold Path*[65]. The Buddha declared: “*Yathāpi puruṣo, tathāiva nārī, dhammaṃ jānēti*” [66]. (*As a man understands Dhamma, so can a woman.*) This pronouncement was a revolutionary response to patriarchal society, making gender equality a core component of Buddhist humanitarianism.

D. Social Application of Non-Violence and Compassion: The *Sutta Piṭaka* emphasises both the philosophical and practical significance of non-violence. The *Dhammapada* states: “*Sabbe tasmati duḥkhaṃ, na paraṃ haniyā*

kathañcana [67]. All beings experience suffering; therefore, one should never harm another. The Buddha's compassion (*karuṇā*) extends to all living beings. The *Mettā Sutta* instructs: “Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu[68]. All beings should be happy—expressing a *universal ethic of compassion*. Non-violence and compassion form the ethical basis of *Buddhist social morality*, aligning closely with modern humanitarian values.

E. The Saṅgha and Social Justice: The Vinaya and suttas of the Sutta Piṭaka provide examples of social justice within the Buddhist community. The Buddha granted equal status to monks and nuns, and the rules of the Saṅgha exclude caste, economic, or gender discrimination[68]. The Saṅgha is not merely a religious institution but a democratic community based on equality, where decisions are made collectively, reflecting the seeds of Buddhist democracy. This structure exemplifies social equality in practice.

F. Labour and Economic Ethics: The Sutta Piṭaka assigns moral and social value to labour. The *Dhammapada* states: “Uṭṭhānaṃ appamādaṃ ca, yo na seveyi na so sukhaṃ” [69]. Those who are not diligent cannot attain happiness. In the *Sigālovamsa Sutta*, the Buddha advises householders to earn wealth through right effort and use it ethically for family, friends, society, and the needy. This demonstrates Buddhist production-oriented social ethics.

G. Economic Equality: The Buddha did not reject wealth but emphasised its *ethical use*. Both the *Dhammapada* and *Aṅguttara Nikāya* advocate earning wealth justly and utilising it for *social welfare*. He instructed monks to avoid greed and householders to practice generosity [70]. These principles resonate with the *fundamental values of modern social welfare economics*.

1. **Essence of Buddhist Humanitarianism:** Humanitarianism in the Sutta Piṭaka is based on three principles: **Compassion** – Equal empathy towards all beings; **Wisdom** – Conduct guided by discernment; **Equanimity** – Impartiality and tolerance. The Buddha asserts: “Na hi verena verāni, sammaṃti dhamma-dā sadā[71]. Hatred never ceases through hatred; it ceases through love. This perspective provides a path to peace and coexistence relevant to contemporary humanity.

H. Contemporary Relevance: The social and humanitarian ideals in the Sutta Piṭaka remain highly relevant today. On a global scale, issues like violence, injustice, inequality, and environmental crises can be addressed through the Buddha's *Middle Path*. “The Buddha's Dhamma represents the philosophy of social revolution[72]. Hence, the Sutta Piṭaka provides the *Buddhist foundation for modern humanism, democracy, and social equality*.

Thus, the Sutta Piṭaka is the centre of social and humanitarian values in Buddhism, encompassing non-violence, compassion, equality, gender parity, and the ethical value of labour. These principles continue to be essential for social justice, democratic governance, and global peace.

The Buddha's message: “Bahujanahitāya, bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya”[73] remains *timeless and profoundly relevant for contemporary humanity*.

CONCLUSION

The Suttapiṭaka stands at the heart of the Buddhist canon as the most direct and comprehensive source of the Buddha's teachings. As the living testimony of the Dhamma, it preserves the Buddha's intellectual, ethical, and spiritual legacy across diverse contexts—ranging from philosophical inquiry and moral instruction to social reflection and meditative practice. Its five Nikāyas collectively articulate a coherent vision of human existence grounded in impermanence, moral responsibility, and the possibility of liberation through self-cultivated wisdom.

An examination of the Suttapiṭaka reveals that Buddhism is not a speculative metaphysics but an experiential path oriented toward the cessation of suffering. The suttas provide a pragmatic framework for ethical living, mental discipline, and critical self-understanding. Their teachings on compassion, equality, non-violence, and rational inquiry also demonstrate a profound social relevance, resonating strongly with modern humanistic and democratic values. For this reason, the Suttapiṭaka has played a vital role not only within monastic traditions but also in modern reform

movements, including Ambedkarite Buddhism, which draws upon its emphasis on human dignity and moral autonomy. Thus, the Suttapiṭaka is indispensable for understanding Buddhist thought in its original depth and contemporary application. It serves simultaneously as a doctrinal foundation, a practical guide to conduct, and a philosophical lens through which to examine the human condition. Any comprehensive study of Buddhism must therefore begin with—and continually return to—the wisdom contained in the Suttapiṭaka, for it remains the clearest expression of the Buddha's vision for personal transformation and social harmony.

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