

## **Reinterpreting Buddhist Ethics: A Study on Karuṇā and Ahimsā in the Context of LGBTIQ+ Identities**

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### **Introduction**

The Buddhist teachings of Karuṇā and Ahimsā the compassion and non-violence are main basic principles in Buddhist ethics and usage of that was changed and misinterpreted in modern times. On the other hand, today, one must deal with a huge society with different identities, and one could do that with his or her own knowledge. Buddhist methods for overall wellbeing are always giving good teachings for each and every one in this society and nowadays, Buddhist ethical concepts need to be added to the modern social identities like LGBTIQ+ society. Although a considerable number of studies have been published on Buddhist ethics, there is still a lack of comprehensive research that applies these ethical principles to modern social identities, particularly the LGBTIQ+ community. This study aims to bridge that gap by offering insights from a Buddhist perspective suited to the contemporary world. Equally, the study could be used to identify the answers to the question that can we apply the universal concepts of Karuṇā and Ahimsā for the better equal rights for the LGBTIQ+ community? Further, The study employs a qualitative approach, including textual analysis of Buddhist scriptures of Pāli canon and, texts related to modern Buddhist interpretations and case studies of Buddhist communities with varying degrees of acceptance of LGBTIQ+ individuals are used to improve and build the idea and discussion of this study. Moreover, the study aims to analyze the traditional interpretations of Karuṇā and Ahimsā concerning gender and sexual diversity, to explore how Buddhist communities currently engage with LGBTIQ+ issues and to find Buddhist solutions for the modern social matters regarding to homosexuality and LGBTIQ+ community are the outcomes of this study. Ultimately, This study is specific in its focus on the intersection of Buddhist ethics and LGBTIQ+ issues, aiming to fill the research gap by providing an in-depth analysis of how key Buddhist principles are applied—or not applied—to contemporary challenges faced by the LGBTIQ+ community.

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## Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design to explore the application of key Buddhist concepts, Karuṇā (compassion) and Ahimsā (non-harm), to the issues faced by the LGBTIQ+ community. It addresses a significant gap in the literature by examining the intersection of Buddhist ethics and modern social identities. Data collection involves two primary methods: textual analysis and case studies. The textual analysis focuses on key Buddhist scriptures from the Pāli Canon and modern interpretations by contemporary Buddhist scholars, particularly in relation to gender and sexual diversity. Case studies of Buddhist communities with varying levels of acceptance of LGBTIQ+ individuals will analyze how these principles are applied in real-life contexts. Data analysis employs thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns across the textual analysis and case studies. This approach aims to understand how traditional Buddhist teachings are interpreted and applied or misinterpreted in contemporary contexts, highlighting current gaps in practice and interpretation. The study ultimately seeks to propose ways to bridge these gaps for a more inclusive application of Buddhist principles, aligning Buddhist ethics with the needs and rights of the LGBTIQ+ community.

## Discussion

In Buddhist teachings, the principles of Karuṇā (compassion) and Ahimsā (non-harm) are foundational elements of ethical conduct, deeply embedded in the Pāli Canon. The Buddha emphasized Karuṇā as an essential quality, encouraging his followers to cultivate boundless compassion for all beings (*Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā*). Similarly, Ahimsā is a core precept, guiding practitioners to avoid causing harm to any living being. The Buddha's teachings in the Metta Sutta in Khuddhakapāta highlight the importance of developing loving-kindness (Metta) and compassion towards all beings, without discrimination.

The Buddha's approach to Karuṇā and Ahimsā extends to the idea of Samanattatā (equality), which he advocated through various teachings. The Buddha rejected the caste system, promoting a vision of social equality where individuals are valued based on their actions rather than their birth. This egalitarian view is reflected in his teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, which apply universally to all beings, regardless of their social status or identity.

When examining the Vinaya Piṭaka, particularly the Bhikkhuni Vinaya and stories related to the conduct of monks and nuns, we find references to behaviors and identities that could be interpreted as relating to homosexuality or non-heteronormative identities. For instance, in the first Khandhaka, the

Mahakkhandhaka, the section on the ordination procedure the Buddha addresses concerns about same-sex relations among monastics. Rather than condemning the individuals, the Buddha's response was focused on maintaining the discipline and harmony within the monastic community. His approach was marked by an understanding of human nature and a compassionate desire to guide his disciples towards the path of enlightenment, without harsh judgment.

The story of Paṭācārā, who sought refuge in the Buddha after facing immense personal suffering, including the loss of her family, further exemplifies the Buddha's compassionate response to those in distress, regardless of their background or circumstances. Although this story is not directly related to LGBTIQ+ issues, it illustrates the Buddha's commitment to offering compassion and non-harm to all beings.

This study highlights the potential for applying Buddhist ethics of *Karuṇā* and *Ahiṃsā* to contemporary discussions on LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusion. The need for reinterpretation arises from the evolving understanding of social identities in the modern world, where traditional interpretations may not fully address the complexities of inclusion and diversity. By reinterpreting these principles within the context of modern social identities, Buddhist communities can cultivate a more inclusive and compassionate environment. The Buddha's teachings, rooted in compassion and non-harm, provide a timeless framework for addressing the challenges faced by the LGBTIQ+ community today, emphasizing the need for equality and understanding in all aspects of life.

## **Results and Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that traditional interpretations of *Karuṇā* (compassion) and *Ahiṃsā* (non-harm) in Buddhist teachings can be reinterpreted to address issues of gender and sexual diversity, including the LGBTIQ+ community. This reinterpretation involves expanding the understanding of these principles to emphasize unconditional compassion and non-harm toward all beings, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. By shifting focus from conventional norms to the broader ethical values of kindness and non-violence, these teachings can foster a more inclusive approach to addressing the needs and rights of the LGBTIQ+ community. In addition, the analysis shows that while some Buddhist communities struggle with acceptance, there is potential for these teachings to be applied in a way that supports inclusivity. The study successfully covers the three main objectives: analyzing traditional interpretations of *Karuṇā* and *Ahiṃsā*, exploring current Buddhist community practices, and proposing Buddhist solutions to modern social matters concerning homosexuality and the LGBTIQ+ community.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Karuṇā (compassion) and Ahimsā (non-harm) offer powerful frameworks for addressing LGBTIQ+ issues within Buddhist communities. By embracing these principles, Buddhist communities can foster greater acceptance and inclusivity. It is recommended that communities engage in compassionate dialogue, reinterpret traditional teachings, and promote equality, ensuring that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect.

**Keywords:** Ahimsā, Equality, Homosexuality, Karuṇā, LGBTIQ+ Community

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