

The Biological Unity of Mankind: A Buddhist Philosophical Framework for Inclusive Pedagogy

G.K.Y.S. Siriwardana¹

Introduction

Racial and ethnic discrimination remains an issue of grave importance, posing serious obstacles to human development and equality worldwide. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports that although there have been improvements in the overall Human Development Index (HDI), such improvements have been made in a highly discriminatory manner. Racism continues to influence racial inequalities through the exclusion of certain people in society due to systemic biases. According to figures from the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), geographical and ethnic disparities continue to prevail, especially among children and indigenous groups who suffer disproportionately. Indigenous communities, for example, experienced extreme poverty at a rate of 63.3%. Since its establishment, the international community, particularly under the leadership of the United Nations (UN), has emphasized the elimination of racism. However, recent technological shifts, including the emergence of "agentic AI"—have brought forth new aspects to discrimination, necessitating updated governance models focused on human rights due diligence and democratic principles.

Despite its lack of any biological foundation, the concept of "race" has been commonly used to legitimize hierarchical structures of superiority and inferiority. Structural racism is one of the main reasons for the creation of disparities, starting from childhood and continuing through adulthood in relation to psychological well-being, academic performance, and social advancement. Public sector organizations, which are meant to be instruments of social participation, often perpetuate these biases, causing barriers for marginalized ethnic and religious communities. This generates what is referred to as a "threshold paradox," whereby organizational processes reproduce institutionalized racism despite supposedly impartial policies.

There is an urgent need for educational frameworks that transcend these constructs and stress humanity's biological oneness. While the term "race" is socially accepted to include a person's color, descent, ancestry, nationality, or ethnicity, it is purely a socio-cultural construct. Intolerance frequently manifests

¹ Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. gkyssir261@kln.ac.lk

globally through specific, institutionalized forms, such as Antigypsyism (anti-Roma racism) in Europe, systemic Antisemitism, and Islamophobia (where religious belonging is used as a proxy for race). To dismantle these structures, this study explores how classical Buddhist philosophical perspectives can be synthesized with modern inclusive pedagogy to counteract systemic prejudice.

Objectives

The primary research aims are as follows:

- To use the Buddhist concept of "the biological unity of mankind" as a foundation for building inclusive teaching and educational practices.
- To align this ancient Buddhist perspective with modern UNDP goals to fight racism and promote fair, inclusive development globally.
- To dismantle the false idea of "race" in schools by replacing social prejudice with the universal values of human dignity and potential.

Methodology

This study utilizes Qualitative Conceptual and Philosophical Analysis research design. Rather than gathering empirical statistical data, the methodology focuses on textual analysis, hermeneutics, and pedagogical framework modeling.

Data Collection

Data collection involved a dual-stream review of primary and secondary literature:

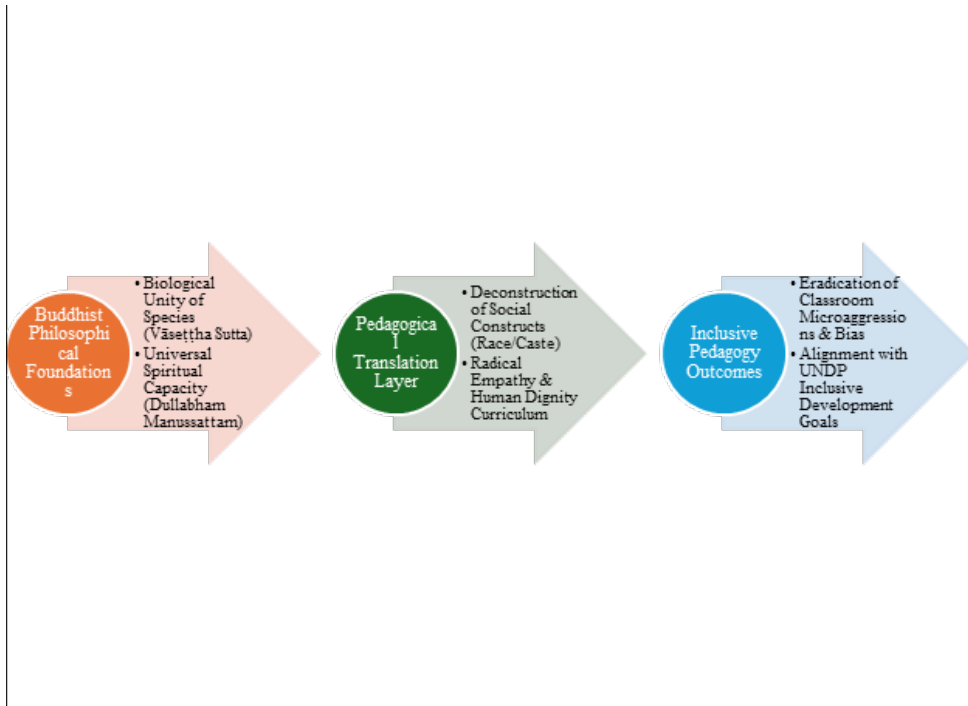
1. Buddhist Canonical Texts: Key discourses from the Pāli Canon (such as the *Vāseṭṭha Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta* and the *Dīgha Nikāya*) focusing on the Buddha's refutation of the caste system and his assertions on human biological unity.
2. Global Development & Human Rights Reports: International human rights frameworks, including recent publications from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UNDP HDI reports, and the MPI dataset.

Data Analysis

The analysis follows a thematic, comparative approach. First, the biological arguments presented by the Buddha are mapped against modern genetic understandings of race. Second, the ethical implications of human

potential (*dullabham manussattam*) are translated into modern pedagogical strategies. This conceptual framework is structured to bridge ancient philosophy with modern institutional inclusion, as illustrated below:

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Author Originated

Results

The conceptual integration of Buddhist philosophy into inclusive pedagogy yielded several structural findings regarding how racism can be deconstructed in an educational setting:

1. The Deconstruction of Biological Race

The primary finding centers on the *Vāsetṭha Sutta*, where the Buddha engages in a scientific and logical debate against the self-importance of the Brahmanic caste theory. The Brahmins claimed superiority on genetic and lineage grounds. The Buddha refutes this by arguing on biological grounds that, unlike the plant and animal kingdoms where differences of species are clearly noticeable (*lingaṃ jātimayaṃ*), mankind constitutes **one single species**.

Kingdom	Phenotypic / Biological Variations	Species Differentiation
Flora (Plants/Trees)	Highly distinct structural, leaf, and fruit differences	Multiple distinct species
Fauna (Animals/Insects)	Vast structural, behavioral, and genetic barriers	Multiple distinct species
Humanity (Mankind)	Superficial variations (skin tone, hair, eye color)	Single, unified species

This view accords remarkably with modern biological science, cutting the ground out from under 18th- and 19th-century scientific racism that attempted to classify men into graded, isolated animalistic hierarchies.

2. Universal Potential vs. Social Stratification

Buddhism emphasizes the worth and dignity of human existence based on internal potential for self-development (*dullabham manussattam*—"Birth as a human being is a rare and precious event"). The findings indicate that:

Humanity possesses an inherent capacity to realize the deepest cosmological truths, independent of birth, caste, or ethnicity.

When the Buddha rebuked monks who felt superior due to fame or gains, he compared them to "worms born in dung, living in dung." This cosmic perspective reinforces radical humbleness, demonstrating that worldly social stratification is ultimately meaningless.

Racism, prejudice, and hate speech ("racial criticism") are identified as institutionalized expressions of fear, ignorance, and a misuse of power. By applying the Buddhist framework, these traits are treated as psychological defilements (*kilesas*) to be unlearned, rather than permanent genetic traits.

Discussion / Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that Buddhist philosophy provides a coherent conceptual framework for understanding the biological unity of humankind and the inherent dignity of every human being. By rejecting race and caste as determinants of human worth, the Buddha's teachings closely align with contemporary scientific evidence that recognizes all human beings as members

of a single biological species. This convergence highlights the continued relevance of Buddhist philosophy in addressing contemporary debates on racism, discrimination, and social exclusion.

The study further shows that the concept of *dullabham manussattam* (the rarity and value of human life) extends the discussion beyond biological equality by emphasizing the equal moral and spiritual potential of every individual. Together, these principles provide a philosophical basis for promoting respect, empathy, and human dignity irrespective of race, ethnicity, religion, or social status.

Rather than presenting an educational solution, this study contributes a conceptual framework that connects Buddhist philosophical insights with contemporary understandings of human equality and inclusive values. This framework may inform future research on educational policy, human rights education, and inclusive pedagogical practices. Future empirical studies could examine how these philosophical principles can be translated into curriculum design and evaluate their effectiveness in reducing prejudice and fostering inclusive learning environments.

Keywords - Buddhism, Inclusive Pedagogy, Biological Unity, Anti-Racism, Human Dignity

References

- Buddha, T. (Year) *Sutta Nipāta* [Vāsetṭha Sutta]. Translated by Initials. Surname. City: Publisher. (Note: Replace with your specific canonical translation edition).
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2025). *Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Report: Geographical and Ethnic Disparities in Global Development*. New York: United Nations.
- European Network Against Racism (ENAR) (2024). 'Structural discrimination and Islamophobia in modern European welfare systems', *Journal of Critical Race Studies*, 12(2), pp. 45–68.
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2023). 'The prohibition of racial discrimination and international human rights instruments', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 45(3), pp. 210–235.