

## **RIGHT INTENTION AND CAUSATION: REFLECTION ON THREE JĀTAKA TALES**

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### **Abstract**

*The focus of this study lies on the right intention (SamyakSaṃkalpa), renunciation of craving, and causation of Karmic fruits (phala) in one's life relating to the chosen tales from the Jātaka. It is one action which helps in liberating oneself from acquiring what one desires because of one's cravings, even though its result is harmful. It highlights the significance of one's karma for changing the current plight bringing references from the selected Jātaka tales. Such a study may help to some extent to counter the tag imposed to Buddhism as pessimistic and even nihilistic philosophy. The research approach adopted for this study includes the observation of Buddhist notion of right intention and causation of karma in three Jātakatales. The study finds that the conscious effort for benevolence purpose changes the destiny of people as reflected to Jātakatales. It also adds renunciation in Buddhism that advocates for the Philanthropic works for common benefits. The study concludes that Jātaka tales are enriched with the idea of hard effort for shaping one's life challenging extraterrestrial or supernatural power.*

**Keywords:** right intention (SamyakSaṃkalpa), Jātaka, causation, karma, craving, renunciation, destiny, Buddhism

### **Introduction**

Buddhism advocates not relying on transcendental gods or supernatural power but on oneself for attaining the Enlightenment. Buddhism aims at attaining enlightenment through understanding the causes of sufferings. The essential elements of getting blissfulness is awareness of ephemeral worldly affairs and compassion to others. Sufferings, its causes and cessation through eight –fold paths namely right kind of view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and

concentration substantiates the essence of Buddhism. This paper concentrates on the significance of right intention to reap the outputs and to reflect on cause and effect relationship of karma in human life. For this purpose, the discussion is focused basically on the three stories- The Sandy Road (Vannupatha Jātaka), The Divine Nature (Deva Dhamma Jātaka) and The Faggot Bringers (Kaṭṭhahāri Jātaka) compiled in *Stories of the Buddha: Being Selection from the Jātaka* edited and translated by Davids (1989). The researcher attempts to

decipher the symbolic meaning of selected Jātaka tales in the light of Buddhist philosophy. Right view (*Samyak Dṛiṣṭi*) and right intention (*Samyak Saṃkalpa*) seem the preliminary qualities of human wisdom leading to karma. Wrong intention does not lead to right action. Blissfulness follows right action harvesting the karmic fruits.

Karma is action and its effect is determined by consciousness. Furthermore, the Buddhist idea and interpretation of karma sounds radical. The Hindu view of karma culminates in *niskama* (work without motive or selfless action) and *atmasamarpan* (self-surrender to God). Whereas, from the Buddhist viewpoint, a person's Karma lies in the attainment of *Nirvana* through a gradual perfection of *Sila* (discipline or ethical living), *Samadhi* (concentration) and *Pajna* (insight or wisdom). In Hinduism, God plays the role for salvation for those who are involved in *niskama karma* with devotion to God but there is no God in Buddhist *Nirvana*. In Hinduism people perform duty having faith in God and believe that right *karma* is rewarded by God. On the contrary, Buddhism just relies on theory of causation that is the belief that right cause has right effects and wrong culminates the wrong results. As Buddhism does not refer to any ultimate power to shape our intention and *karma*, people take it as pessimistic view. However, researchers find it scientific

because it makes an individual responsible for his or her *karmic* fruits rather than relying on any God.

### Literature Review

Removal of suffering without detachment has no space in Buddhism. Craving (*Tṛiṣṇā*) to material gain not only keeps the life unhappy but also causes the cycle of rebirth to fulfill the unfulfilled wishes. Singh (2009, p.38), in his book *The Quintessence of Buddhism* refers the discourse contained in Dharmacakraparivartana Sutta, “Birth is suffering. Decay is suffering. Disease is suffering. To be united with the unloved is suffering. To be separated from the loved is suffering. Not to receive what one craves for is suffering”. Birth itself results from the unfulfilled desires or it is karmic chain. After birth, people have to undergo difficulties, diseases, dissatisfactions and death. Separation with loved ones or compelling situation to live with people who are not the chosen causes sufferings. In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Rinpoche (1992, p.96), the causation of birth is mentioned as “The truth and the driving force behind rebirth is what is called karma. Karma is often totally misunderstood in the West as fate or predestination; it is best thought of as the infallible law of cause and effect that governs the universe”. Literally, Karma means action. In depth, it indicates power underlying within action or result of

actions. Every action and reaction revolve in motion determining destiny of a person. There might be long chain of karmic cycle of a person including the causes and effects of previous births. The right way for happiness is to keep on working with right view and intention in this life renouncing craving. Craving for material gain pushes people to misery. It does not necessarily mean renunciation of material gains but the craving to material gains because it blocks the way for working with right intention.

Buddhism advocates work with compassion that germinates from right view and intention devoid of attachment and dogmas (Harischandra lal Singh, 2009) states in *The Quintessence of Buddhism*:

The Buddha's rational approach to problems of man and the solution to those problems have inspired men of science and thinkers of the West. Immanuel Kant's belief that man should continue his way towards perfection in progress is influenced by the Buddha's belief in the attainment of *Nirvana* through the perfection in *sila*, *Samadhi* and *prajna*. Like Kant, . . . Schopenhauer regarded will as evil and held it responsible for the suffering in the world. (108)

The responsibility of mankind lies in the scientific inquiry and ethics in Buddhist view. It discards borrowing any dogmas to prove one right. Singh (2009) borrows the idea of Max Muller regarding Buddhism

in *The Quintessence of Buddhism*, "It has enabled the lives of the deluded and has purified the corrupted lives. . . it has encouraged the feeble, united the divided, enlightened the ignorant, elevated the base and dignified the noble" (187). Buddhism works for all to make this world a better place respecting the truth of consciousness from any sect of people instead of favoring particular sect and promoting beliefs.

Changing reality in relation to cause and effect incorporates the essence of Buddhism. It does not adhere to eternal reality but believes in phenomenological reality. In "Everyday Life and Ultimate Reality: Dialectical Reversals in Hegel, Heidegger and Buddhism", O'Leary (2014, p.465) asserts, "Buddhism relentlessly exposes the impermanent, painful and insubstantial character of all phenomena, but it ends up reinstating the conventional Samsaric world as the place where Nirvanic emptiness can be skillfully exercised". The state of non-attachment releases from the sufferings and helps to get *Nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa* does not aim mere emptiness but aspires for 'higher self' through exploring oneself. Morrison (1999, p.9) in "Nietzsche and Buddhism" elaborates nihilism. He keeps his views, "man was the center of nothing other than his own existence; there was no extraterrestrial providential force for looking after his destiny, nor was the natural world structured for his welfare". Buddha defies worshipping

unseen forces expecting good fortune. He advocates for exploring oneself to dig out inner potentialities. Exploring oneself cannot be possible as long as craving and attachment persists. Non-attachment helps for emptying craving, reducing suffering and engaging oneself in creative works, not only for self but for others as well. Nirvāṇais the state of having open mind evacuating preoccupied cases of suffering. It prepares a person for attaining new height abandoning the baggage of obstructions. Morrison (1999, p.27) further claims, “To attain Nirvāṇa is to overcome the sense of depression felt when life was seen to be without value and meaning”. There is an accusation to Buddhist philosophy that it kills the desire for material prosperity and hinders progress. The accusation is fallacious because after the state of Nirvāṇa a person does not stop working rather works for wider humanity rising above from small coterie. It is greater work to have compassion to other not limiting oneself to selfish craving. It supports for collective welfare that is loudly discussed as communism in political sphere but it is still a far cry.

Christianity believes in cleansing the sins of human being but the idea of Buddhism is removing suffering. Morrison (1999, p. 25) further emphasizes on same issue, “Buddhism no longer speaks of the ‘struggle against sin’ but, quite in accordance with actuality, the ‘struggle

against suffering which is simply a physiological fact”. Buddhism concerned to attaining ‘higher self’ through renunciation. It deplores escapism, rather emphasizes wider achievement for the reduction of suffering of humankind. It focuses on making this life effective instead of rituals cleansing to get rid of sins. It means sins are not cleared; it reaps results in one’s karmic cycle. It opposes intentional sins and appeals for reducing ignorance through enlightenment.

Transformation of a person from ignorance to blissfulness overcoming general bondage embarks the Buddhist philosophy of life. Bondage of attachment, greed, selfishness causes suffering. Cession of suffering demands detachment and readiness to embrace compassion. The journey of life diverts from ignorance to enlightenment with our own conscious effort. Zimmer (1952, p.475) in *Philosophies of India* points out, “to enter the Buddhist vehicle...from the shore of the common-sense experience of non-enlightenment, the shore of spiritual ignorance (avidyā), desire (kama) and death (maran) to the yonder bank of transcendental wisdom(vidyā) which is liberation (mokṣa)”. Buddhism entreats for transformation changing the thought and practices in life. Buddha himself does not favor theory in life rather pleads to realize oneself thorough mediation. Reflection to oneself and meditation can

be the great initiation to travel the journey of greater life. The compassion brings people together and craving invites tussle. Zimmer (1952, p.553) further asserts, “Compassion(karuṇā), indeed is the force that holds things in manifestation- just as it withholds the Bodhi sattva from Nirvāṇa”. Buddha believes that man is the maker of his own destiny. The man who controls his mind is the conqueror. The Buddha is the conqueror as he changed the world with the power of love, wisdom and compassion. Nirvāṇa literally means giving up or going away. It means complete liberation from all state of existence and abandonment of lust, jealousy and ignorance which changes the course of life and we come as if ‘new born’ creature for the new beginning of righteous actions. As Buddhism believes on changing the course of life by transformation, it is based on causation.

### **Methodology**

This research follows the qualitative research design accessing and assessing data from selected books, scholarly journals and internet sources are used. Critical and interpretative methods are used for analyzing textual data and philosophy of Buddhism. The study attempts to analyze right view(*Samyak Dṛiṣṭi*) and right intention(*Samyak Saṃkalpa*) in the light of theory of causation. When the consciousness is deviated, deviated *karma* is bound to follow. Right *karma* cannot be expected from wrong consciousness. This

idea has been evaluated in the three Jātaka tales selected for this research.

### **Analysis**

Rising above craving and inculcating benevolence of compassion leads to redemption. Buddhism might be mistaken as pessimistic attitude toward life but it denies passive nihilism. It favors tireless effort in life with right thought and intention. The race of life for being better personality and ability to withstand and tackle the suffering that comes in life have been focused in the Jātaka tales. In the world of rivalry and revenge, the Buddhist view of cooperation and renunciation can be a hallmark for an ideal world. The three stories chosen here from Jātaka tales for the analysis of the theory of causation and its fruits emanating from right intention highlights the main motive of Buddhism.

### **Interpretation of “The Sandy Road”**

There is advocacy for tireless effort in the story “The Sandy Road”. The monk who gives up the efforts is asked to continue his journey reminding his past adventurous journey. The narrative of the past fascinates readers. Bodhisat finds green grass in the oasis in the vast desert and makes guess there must be underground water. He instructs his attendants to dig up the ground but the rock blocks the digging process. The caravan-leader and his team aim to sell lot of goods in the hinterlands across the desert and make heavy profit. There are lot of carts pulled by oxen. The

oxen do not have energy to pull the carts as they are extremely thirsty. Bodhisat instructs the caravan leader not to give up but take the hammer and strike on the rock.

Symbolically, journey in the desert with oxen pulling carts refers difficult course in life, the rock indicates barrier in the course of life. Waterless journey shows acute scarcity in life. Hammer functions as a tool to combat difficulties. Finally, the fruits of toil returns, "... a spout of water rose up as high as a palm tree. All drank and bathed...they sold the goods at double and fourfold profit, and with wares returned to their homes" Davids (1989, p.4). The flow of water in the oasis amidst the desert depicts the importance of continuous effort for achieving success. The story suggests not losing hope and attempting till the end accepting challenges in life. As water oozed out without any supernatural force, it gives a message that destiny gets shaped by our karma, not by extraterrestrial force. Rinpoche (1992, p.97) asserts, "Karma does not decay like external things, or ever become inoperative. It cannot be destroyed 'by time, fire, or water'. Its power will never disappear, until it is ripened. Although the results of our actions may not have matured yet, they will inevitably ripen". Karma pays its fruits either in the exiting life or in next life. Good deeds yield good destiny and immoral deeds pushes to difficulties. As an imperishable property, karma pays its returns.

### **Interpretation of "The Divine Nature"**

Similarly, Right intention (SamyakSamkalpa) guides to right path and yields positive results. Mere desires without right intention cannot cause positive outcomes but extends the labyrinth of sufferings. In the story "The Divine Nature" the king of Benares, Brahmadata leaves for forest along with his sons Bodhisat ( also called Mahingsasa) and Chanda( Moon) handing over the rein of kingdom to a queen after the death of Bodhisat's mother. The queen compels the king to hand over his kingdom to her son Suriya( Sun). Though the king refuses at first, he wants to avoid impending dangers. He convinces Bodhisat and Chanda stating, "When Suriya was born I gave a choice, now his mother begs for the kingdom for him...she might devise evils against you; do you go into the forest. When I am gone you might reign over the kingdom" Davids (1989, p.7). But the youngest son Suriya follows them as he seems unwilling to be alienated from his brothers. On the way they feel sharp thirst. Bodhisat sends his brothers in search of water one after another. In a lake water-demon called The Sprite resides who allures to descend to the lake, bathe, drink, eat lotus stalks but all brothers are missed by the hands of the demon. The Sprite asks a question "What is divine?" Davids (1989, p.8). When the people cannot answer such a philosophical question he takes them away.

Finally, Bodhisat approached the Sprite he answered to the question in a verse:

“Those who are modest and discreet,

On things that are pure intent,

The holy men, the lovely men,

Thesetheworldcallsdivine.”Davids

(1989, p.8)

The Sprite is pleased with the answer and offered a choice of revitalizing any one brother. Bodhisat asks to revive the youngest brother Suriya, the son of his stepmother. The choice of Bodhisat surprises the demon and he asks the reasons. Bodhisat replies that it was on that boy’s account that they entered the forest; it was for that boy’s sake that his mother begged the kingdom; that boy never turning back came with them; if he was devoured in the forest by a sprite, no one would believe them. Applauding BodhisatThe Sprite returns all brothers alive. Bodhisat passes the test and able to return all brothers from the hands of the demon. The text implies that right intention leads to right decision in right time. If Bodhisat was unshaken with attachment to his own brothers and did not show compassion to his step-brother, he would lose all brothers. His wisdom was already reflected by his answer to an abstract question, which is further justified by his action of compassion to his step-brother. It also seems that step-brother, Suriya, has deep attachment to Bodhisat and Chanda because he followed them into the forest

leaving the palace and his mother. Good result is achieved by good intention and compassion, not by attachment and stake of selfishness.

Wisdom is expressed by the words of right intention but it further demands righteous karma. In the story “The Divine Nature” the words of Bodhisat do not turn fake because he displays right intention into action by choosing his step-brother. Right view causes right intention. Right intention causes right results. If the intention is wrong the words do not change into reality. View, intention and action are interdependent. Rinpoche (1992, p.98) claims, “Because the law of karma is inevitable and infallible, whenever we harm others, we are directly harming ourselves, and whenever we bring them happiness, we are bringing ourselves future happiness”. The intention of harming other turns to be counter-productive. Compassion even conquers the evil forces as Bodhisat wins the confidence of the demon or we can say the demon was doing his karma to provide people’s karmic fruits. In *Tales and Teaching of Buddha*, Jones (2001, p.46) explains, “Karma can shape our disposition, which in turn can shape our destiny in a given life. A water-sprite, who devours all who enter his pool, is told by the Bodhisat that his nasty disposition is in consequence of its evil deeds in times past”. Interestingly, he is humble to the demon and thus succeeds in taming the water-sprite.

After getting good results, he thought he has to tame the demon for the benevolence of humankind. Entrenched with the thought of his social responsibility, he persuades the demon not to carry out such evil works. He entreats to the demon, “My good man, through what you have done in the past that was evil you have been re-born as a sprite, eating flesh and blood of others. You are still doing evil. This... will not grant you release from hell and the rest” Davids (1989, p.9). Mahayana sect of Buddhism believes in redemption of all human being. Individual redemption is not enough to remove the sufferings in the world. Bodhisat could not be happy after rescuing his brothers only. He wants to fulfill his responsibilities to humanity by taming the demon. Interestingly, if he had killed the demon, he would have got great applaud from the people. But, the Buddhist perspective is to change the evil forces using conscious attempt.

#### **Interpretation of “Faggot Bringer”**

Dependency on cause and effect as per karma determines the future. Fate is not pre-destined. Devoid of good effort, good fortune hardly takes place. Buddhism believes in creating our own destiny through righteous effort. Rinpoche (1992, p.99) asserts, “Karma means our ability to create and to change. It is creative because we can determine how and why we act. We can change. The future is in our hands and in the hands of our heart”. Negation

of supernatural power to determine one’s destiny can be observed in Jātaka tales. Buddhist tales inspire to depend on our righteous words and actions for better future. In the story “Faggot Bringer” the king, Brahmadata, losing his heart to sweet voice and beauty of a faggot bringer, lingered with her in the garden. The king gives her a ring and suggests keeping it with her for maintenance if a daughter is born. If a son is born, he instructs to bring the boy in the palace with the ring. When the boy was grown up he wants to find out his father. As per the wish of her son, the lady goes to the palace carrying the boy with the ring. The king does not accept the boy and claims that the ring does not belong to him. The king abuses the power to suppress the voice of the lady being ashamed of the surrounding assembly. Finally, the king has to accept the fact and the king is compelled to give the boy viceroyalty and make his mother chief queen. The power of king could not alter the destiny of the woman and the boy. He has to accept them because of his own karma. However, if the woman had not gone to the palace and mustered the courage to counter the king, the king might have cheated her. Jones (2001, p.112) asserts, “The law of karma cannot be cheated. Sooner or later, every meritorious deeds must have its reward”. In the story, the power of karma becomes more vehement than the power of the position. If the woman had not made effort,

the power of position would have been overwhelming for that moment. Therefore, destiny can be created and changed with our own efforts. Our karma may not pay soon in the absence of effort and may take years or even next birth for it to happen.

### **The Common Notion from the Three Stories**

The commonality found in the stories discussed above is that Buddhism discards divine punishment of unseen force against the sins. Destiny depends on effects of one's input as karma. Abelson(1993, p.266) in "Schopenhauer and Buddhism" compares Nāgārjuna and Schopenhauer, "Both Nāgārjuna and Schopenhauer saw man's suffering not as some divine punishment but as something bound up with our very experience of reality". Buddhism goes against fatalism and regards works and experiences of one's life like deposited cash for future use. In "Free Your Mind: Buddhism, Causality, And the Free Will Problem", Coseru(2020, p. 463) opines, "Buddhism provides ample testimony for the possibility of cultivating to a high degree cardinal virtues such as non-violence, . . .the notion of agent causation". Living virtuous life for enhancement of self and contribute for better days seems the pivotal principle of Buddhism. In "Sandy Road" the 'Unwearing digging' in the desert is paid by providing water. In "Divine Nature" good intention and compassion of the eldest brother is being paid by revitalizing

all missing brothers. In "Faggot Bringer" the effort of both the son and the mother is paid by making them viceroyalty and the chief queen respectively. Vast desert, demon in the lake and royal power of the king represent barriers for advancement. Vast desert indicates natural barrier, demon in the lake denotes supernatural power and the power of the king depicts human power. Whether natural or supernatural or human power, each of them is defeated. It portrays the message that payment to karma is inevitable.

The stories are symbolic in nature. In all stories chosen above, we notice life full of barriers and sufferings. The characters in the stories do not choose the way of escaping from the sufferings. They combat against the sufferings with their conscious effort. They do not take revenge. They are not guided by the vested interest of self-fulfillment. Their benevolence is finally paid. Malignant nature is not only destructive for others but it also obstructs the way for personal progress. Work for benevolence is useful not only for others but for personal progress. Personal progress lies in the mutual benefit.

### **Conclusion**

Jātaka tales reflect the Buddhist philosophy of righteous vision, intention and work for crafting one's destiny. Renunciation of craving and self-centeredness opens the avenues for

happiness. Jātaka tales observed for this paper inspire for changing the life finding oneself with new enthusiasm and insight breaking the notion of pre-determined destiny. The tales show the path to blissful life through contentment and compassion. To be specific, the tales attempt to inculcate the instinct of free man; free from preoccupied prejudice for crossing the boundaries of barriers exploring one's 'higher self'. The story sheds light on the persistent efforts with consciousness shall help to dismantle the obstructions in life and simultaneously create one's fate.

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