

**MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF THE SUTTA-PIṬAKA:
A STRUCTURAL & THEMATIC STUDY BASED ON THE
SELECTED SUTTAS**

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Introduction

Buddhism as a non-theistic religion teaches us the way that one should direct his/her attention to the emancipation. On the other hand, it does not proscribe if one wishes to fulfill his or her aspirations in this very life. When the Buddha preached He had to deliver the discourses relevant to the audience and specially, cognitive components of the listeners. At such moment, he used some similes, motifs, metaphors and stories for better understanding of the discourses. Those similes, motifs, metaphors and stories consist offolktales, legends and myths or mythical themes. It is one of techniques used by the Buddha to deliver the *Dhamma*.

Myths are not lies as generally believed. As Mircea Eliade (*Myths and Reality, World Perspective Series, London, 1964, pp.18-19*) states a myth has five characteristics. In brief, these five features can be mentioned as follows,

1. Constitutes the History of the acts of the Super naturals;
2. That this history is considered to be absolutely true and sacred;
3. That myth is always related to a creation;
4. That by knowing the myth one knows the origin of things and;
5. That in one way or another one “lives” the myth, in the sense that one is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted.

All these points belong to the studies of myths which started as a prominent subject in recent years. In my point of view that carries along with the topic would be basically dependon the Sutta-piṭaka, definitely carries the Buddha’s own word. It is quiet significant that the Buddha used myths and are found in the Sutta-piṭaka is not that could questioned. Why it

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is saying that one can not say Buddhism is beyond the myths. As we probably say myth is not just a saying, miracle, metaphor, story or magic. In this manner, it is of course, one of symbolical techniques that Buddha used for better understanding of *Dhamma*. In that sense, we surely state that the myths which are available in the Sutta-piṭaka start to prove the significant analysis of Buddhist teachings.

When we fundamentally analyze the Sutta-piṭaka with the intention of finding myths it proves that narrating stories like Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata existed in the Indian society (*akkhānampāṇissaramvetālam*) with reference to the Brahmajāla-sutta (D.P.70). Simultaneously we would turn into the Kūṭadanta-sutta (D.pp.133-43) which reveals such a mythical story of the King Mahāvijita. In this story we find the king who endowed with Eight Things (*aṭṭhahiṅgehisamannāgato*), the Chaplain who had Four Things (*catūhiṅgehisamannāgato*), the great Sacrifice with sixteen reasons (*soḍḍasaparikkhārā*) and reference on previous birth; the Buddha was the Brahmin chaplain who conducted the sacrifice. (This remarks the significance of the *Jātaka* Stories). All these typical things are somewhat mythical and Anthropologists like Lévi-Strauss, Joseph Cambell and Edmund Leach have studied stories like these not in religious contexts but in their works related with studies of myths.

Discussion

It is of course; quite a difficult task, analyzing all myths and legends of the Sutta-piṭaka without having structures with themes. I hope to study all of these myths in a structural viewpoint. It is what we expect here is to collect all the myths of the Sutta-piṭaka and analyze one by one and put them into relevant structures. I have tentatively collected data on the Sutta-piṭaka entitled some motifs of myths and put into various structures as below.

- Origin of the World
 - Brahmajāla-sutta (D)
 - Aggañña-sutta (D)
 - Tevijja-sutta (D)
- Mythical Stories
 - Kūṭadanta-sutta (D)
 - Mahāsudassana-sutta (D)
 - Adhammika-sutta (A)
 - Āṇi-sutta (A)
- Detailed account on purgatories
 - Cūlapuṇṇama-sutta (M)
 - Kokālika-sutta (S)
 - Tālapuṭa-sutta (S)
 - Mahāpariēāha-sutta (S)
 - Bālavagga(A)
 - Catukka-nipāta(A)
 - Nidāna-sutta (A)
 - Navaka-nipāta(A)
- Reference on Devas/Spirits
 - Brahmajāla-sutta (D)
 - Mahāli-sutta (D)
 - Tika-nipāta(A I)
 - Mahāsamaya-sutta (D)
 - Mahāsīhnāda-sutta (M)
 - Dhanañjāni-sutta (M)
 - Gilāna-sutta (S)
 - Sisūpacālātherīgāthā (Kn)
- Dhammatā or realities
 - Mahāpadāna-sutta (D)
 - Acchariyabbhūta-dhamma-sutta (M)
- Seizure of Rāhu, lord of Asura
 - Candima-sutta (SI) - *Candima*, the Moon deity was seized by *Rāhu*, lord of *Asura*
 - Suriya-sutta (SI) - *Suriya*, the Sun deity was seized by *Rāhu*, lord of *Asura*
- Sources on Aeon (Kappa)
 - Ekapuggala-sutta
 - Pabbata-sutta
 - Sāsapa-sutta
 - A II
 - Gaṅgā-sutta
 - Sāvaka-sutta
- Suttas with “Bhūtapubbam” title
 - Nandana-sutta (S) - A particular god proclaims on the impermanence of the wealth of the Heavenly Spheres.
 - Rohitassa-sutta (A) - Rohitassa, a sage who wanted to reach world’s end.
 - Dutiya-aputtaka-sutta (S) - Ancient story related to Tagarasikī, the *Pacceka Buddha*
 - Kūṭadanta-sutta (D) - Story on the King

Mahāvijita

Āṇi-sutta (A, SII) - A story on Dasaraha's large drum called 'Summoner'

Mahāsudassana-sutta (DII) - A kingdom called Kusāvati which was ruled by the King Mahāsudassana

All these facts and data prove that the Sutta-piṭaka is pregnant with myths and legends besides its historically developed philosophical context. In my research I wish to analyze these myths in different contexts without neglecting their religious meanings and sort them out to the structures.

Methods and Procedure

In this research I primarily base on the Sutta-piṭaka and the Commentaries as necessary. Although this is not a comparative study, I wish to study and keep sources from Oriental Mythology, Occidental Mythology and related sources from Anthropology as well. I think that I have to meet some of eminent scholars who are experts in this field and verify things occasionally.

This research is basically based on the Sutta-piṭaka. It is because the Sutta-piṭaka is which carries Five Texts namely Dīgha-nikāya, Majjhima-nikāya, Saṅyutta-nikāya, Aṅguttara-nikāya and Khuddaka-nikāya are full of myths and legends. The Vinaya and the Abhidhamma texts do not contain these types of sources. Although it is of course; a larger scope of the research, apart from the Sutta-piṭaka we never find enough sources in individual texts. For instance; in the Majjhima-nikāya myths are quiet rare. In the Aṅguttara-nikāya, though we find references they are not much enough for a thematic and structural study. With this circumstance I have to depend on the Sutta-piṭaka. Even though in the whole of Khuddaka-nikāya we find enough references on myths, our attention will be focused on only three texts from the Khuddaka-nikāya. In the Thera-Therīgāthās due to the utterances of elder monks and nuns some are available. They are categorically responses to the *Māra*, *Deva* or Spirits. In the Dhammapada

and Sutta-nipāta also gives a lot of details on the topic here and from the Khuddaka-nikaya we do not turn into other twelve texts. Although the research is not a comparative study with Buddhism and Mythology it is significant with its structural and thematic studies. So that, I have to study Anthropology, Oriental Mythology and Occidental Mythology with reference to the selected topic. In this research the data is from the Sutta-piṭaka and the structures are sorted out accordingly above fields related to the myths.

Results

Myths and legends of the Sutta-piṭaka show structural and thematic significances of the deliverance of *Dhamma*.

Conclusions

At a surface level, one can easily say that Buddhism has no concern of myths. But, in a broad sense it reveals that the suttas of the Sutta-piṭaka are full of myths and legends. It is to be understood that myths are not false or such mysteries. But, the thing is that all these sources of myths are served some religious purpose. Buddhism like a religion of living philosophy does not promote myths or mysteries to sustain its tenets. In this background, my effort is to find those myths categorically and stress their purposes in a religious manner. It is somewhat problematic that myths in the Sutta-piṭaka are to understand the *Dhamma* more or just a saying, story or indication.

Keywords: Sutta-piṭaka, Myths and Legends, Structures, Themes

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