



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

अनन्ता

ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2021; 7(6): 68-69

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www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 04-09-2021

Accepted: 06-10-2021

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Importance of māra episode in buddhacarita: A philosophical study

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The earliest Sanskrit poetry of the classical type was that of the Buddhist writer Aśvaghōṣa who composed a metrical life of Buddha through his writing in a comparatively simple Classical Sanskrit. The poet was a great philosopher and his philosophical topics were more impressive than he is non-philosophical ones. He had noticed that the general trend of men is mad after objects of pleasure. So, with the intention of capturing the minds of search men addicted to other things, he was compelled to teach them Salvation under the cloak of Kāvya poetry. His philosophical portions are nothing but verification of Buddhist teaching.

In Sanskrit literature poet Aśvaghōṣa was famous predecessor of poet Kālidāsa. Aśvaghōṣa's writing was based on Buddhism. It is famous that he belongs to Kuṣāṇa Emperor, at the time the king Kaniṣka. In this time Buddhism was already well established among the people of India and also in non Indian people and abroad. For this reason, Buddhism reflected in Indian literature, art and social culture. He was the writer of two great epics Buddhacarita and Saundarnanda. His popular drama was Sāriputtaprakaraṇa. He wrote also Gaṇḍīstotragāthā, Vajrasūchī, Sūtrālmkāra and Mahāyānaśraddhotpāda. Buddhacarita is the most popular book in Sanskrit literature.

The book Buddhacarita has 28 cantos but now the half of cantos is available in its original form. The book begins with the birth of Siddhārtha and ends with great spiritual battle with Māra. After defeating Māra, Siddhārtha became Buddha and got Nirvāṇa. In Sanskrit 17 Cantos is present and of these first 13 cantos is genuine. Other cantos were written by Amṛtānanda. The exact source of Buddhacarita is still unknown. But one theory is well established that Aśvaghōṣa was influenced by Lalitavistara. This book was written in Sanskrit prose of playing type. The poem of Buddhacarita falls in four distinct, parts of length 7 cantos each and equal weight, corresponding to four stages of the Buddha's life.

In the 13 book we have found the Buddha's temptation by Māra and his three daughters. As Māra distinctly identified with Kāma, the flower armed God.

यं कामदेवं प्रवदन्ति लोके चित्रायुधं पुष्पशरं तथैवा
कामप्रचाराधिपतिं तमेव मोक्षद्विषं मारमुदाहरन्ति॥¹

Aśvaghōṣa described the riddle of life in his book Buddhacarita. The Prince Siddhārtha saw the originality of life like Old age, Disease and Death. He wanted to know from his father Śuddhodana let not my life be subject to death and let not disease impair this health of mine. Let not old age attack my youth and let not misfortune destroy my weal. Śuddhodana said it is impossible.

न भवेन्मरणाय जीवितं मे विहरेत्स्वास्थ्यमिदं च मे न रोगः।
न यौवनमाक्षिपेज्जरा मे न च सम्पत्तिमपाहरेद्विपत्तिः॥²

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¹ बुद्धचरितम्-13/2

² तत्रैव- 5/35

Meeting with disappointment like old age, disease and death prince Siddhārtha leaves his house and sacrifices his all comforts. He seeks for the incomparable peace, the highest truth. The great Siddhārtha thus sat down to obtain perfect knowledge or the way of Salvation-Nirvāṇa.

ततो भुजङ्गो प्रवरेण संस्तुतस्तृणान्युपादाय शुचीनि लावकात्
कृतप्रतिज्ञो निषसाद बोधये महातरोर्मूलमपाश्रितः शुचेः॥³

But Māra, the enemy of good law was afraid by the determination of Siddhārtha. Māra was famous by the name of Kāmadeva, the lord of Desire and enemy of liberation. By the determination of Siddhārtha the whole earth rejoiced with joy, but Māra alone Lord of five desires, bringer of death and enemy of truth was grieved and not happy. When Siddhārtha shut down under the Bodhi tree for his search, Māra felt very sad. He has three sons- Confusion, Gaiety and Pride. He has three daughters also- Lust, Delight and Thirst. His daughters and sons asked him the reason of Siddhārtha's despondency. He answered- this sage wearing the Armour of resolution and having drawn the arrow of wisdom with the barb of truth, sits yonder intending to conquer my realms, so I am afraid and this is the despondency of my mind. If he succeeds in overcoming me and proclaims to the world the path of final bliss, all this my real will become empty. Māra was determined so he seized his flower made bow and his five infatuating arrows. He drew near to the route of Aśvattha tree with his children. He was ready for disturbing Siddhārtha. He is the great disturber of the minds of living beings. Māra thus addressed, the Buddha – up, up Kṣatriya! afraid of death follow your own duty and abandon this law of liberation. In many ways Māra wanted to afraid Bodhisattva. He uttered fear inspiring threats and raised a whirl wind so that the skies were darkened and the ocean roared and trembled. But Siddhārtha remained calm.

Māra wants to tempt Bodhisattva in many ways but he paid no attention to him. So he discharged his arrow at him setting in front of him, his daughters and his sons. But he could not succeed in his aim. So Māra called to mind in his own army, wishing to work the overthrow of Siddhārtha. The evil or demons of Māra encircled the root of Bodhi tree on every side and eager to destroy it. So they are waiting for the command of their Lord. The battle of Māra and Bodhisattva were very dangerous. But they are unable to defeat the great sage. In spite of all these various scorching assaults on the body of Bodhisattva and his mind, and all this missiles showered down upon him. Siddhārtha did not in the least degree more from his posture clasping firmly in his resolution as a kinsman. Because even the fire might lose its hot nature, water lose his fluidity, Earth its steadiness, but never will Siddhārtha to abandon in his resolution. As quoted by Buddhacarita-

अप्युष्णभावः ज्वलनं प्रजह्यादापो द्रव्यत्वं पृथिवी स्थिरत्वम्
अनेककल्पाचितपुण्यकर्मा न त्वेव जह्याद्वय सायमेषः॥⁴

Then having seen the unshaken firmness of great saint Māra departed, dispirited and broken in purpose with very arrows. Bodhisattva defeated by strong determination according to Buddhacarita-

ततो मारबलं जित्वा ध्यैरेण च शमेन च
परमार्थं विजिज्ञासुः स दध्यौ ध्यानकोविदः॥⁵

By his meditation Buddha realized that all human being an entire universe did not know that they all go in born and decay through their existence. Buddha saw that birth, old age and disease are inevitable truth. Because when there is birth there is also old age and disease present. He perceived that where there has been the attachment to existence and there arises previous existence. Existence occurs for desire and desire arises because of sensation. Sensation arises where there is contact. He also saw by his meditation that contact arises through the six organs of sense. At last Buddha realized that all these arise in ignorance. Thus ignorance is the cause of birth, disease, old age and death. In short he realized that ignorance is the cause of all sufferings. Thus this is the mystery of life. According to Buddhacarita-

वेदनायाः समुत्पन्नाः तृष्णाभिः संप्रवर्तते
तृष्णोद्भूतमुपादानभवो भवः॥
भवे जातिः समुत्पन्नाः जातेर्जरारूपादयः।
जरारोगाम्निमन्तसः मृत्युना ग्रस्यते जगत्॥⁶

Thus the Buddha realized that this is pain, this also is the origin of pain in the world of living being, this is also the stopping of pain and this is that course which leads to its stopping.

After becoming Buddha, he shows the way of Nirvāṇa, Buddha begin to expand the Dharma. He says Dharma is the truth, it is the sacred law. Dharma alone can deliver us from error, from wrong and from sorrow. He points out the four noble truths that lead to Nirvāṇa. He advised that the attainment of truth is possible only when self is recognized as an illusion. The perfect peace is can dwell only when all vanity has disappeared.

So, in Buddhacarita we can see how Siddhārtha became Buddha, how Māra defeated by Siddhārtha. We therefore say Māra is nothis more than illusion. If men are able to recognize the originality of life he then will become Buddha. He is also can destroy Māra and able to gets Nirvāṇa, the way of Salvation.

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³ तत्रैव-12/116

⁴ तत्रैव-13/58

⁵ तत्रैव-15/1

⁶ तत्रैव-14/52-53