

## An Analysis of Moral and Generosity in Vessantara Jataka

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### Abstract

This aim offers an analysis of the character of the protagonist in Vessantara Jataka in Theravada Buddhism. The Vessantara ideal of extreme self-sacrifice with special reference to his occupation. The analysis focuses on the moral and those of good actions done by the Vessantara. The Vessantara Jataka is one of the top widespread a legendary material core on the Buddha's descriptions of praiseworthy episodes conducts in his former life. The Vessantara Jataka states the tale of one of Buddha's previous lives, concerning a sympathetic prince, Vessantara, who donates the whole thing he possesses, containing his children, by this means showing the virtue of perfect charity. The Vessantara Story, an account of beyond what is ordinary or usual acting generously, is one of the greatest significant stories in the Buddhist world.

**Keywords:** Characteristic, Good Action, Protagonist.

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### Introduction:

Jataka, life stories of the Buddha, discuss to the Dharma (Buddha's teachings) relating the stories of the Buddha's former lives. The Vessantara was born as the Bodhisattva in the capital city of Jatuttara. According to tradition, his mother was a princess who did a great worth and value in Buddhism and wished to become the Bodhisattva's mother in the future who would be the next Buddha. After princess expired, she goes to the Heavenly Realm and became one of the deities Indra's mates. She dwells with happiness until the day she has to born again as a human being. Indra gives ten blessings to her and one of them is she wants to become the

Bodhisatta's mother. She was born to a king's court when she moved to the human world and later wedded to the king Sanjaya.

India is the original place of this story. Prince Vessantara is the son of Sanjaya, the King of the Sivas, and of Queen Phusatī. The prince resides in the luxury castle with his better half Maddi and their children, Jali and Kanha. His acting generousness is highly unusual. He possesses a magical white elephant that assures abundant rain, significant in an agricultural economy. However, he gives this elephant to a Brahmin delegate from another kingdom, which makes the citizens enrage for him. They force King Sanjaya to drive Prince Vessantara and his spouse, Maddi, who maintains an association with him and their small son and daughter, to drive away from a city. At what happened, before Vessantara's departure, he took off all of his properties. After they took a long expedition on foot, they arrived at a place in the foothills, where they decided to live their lives. They make a vow to dwell in abstaining from sexual relations. Presently, a bad old Brahmin called Jujaka, who is annoyed by his young wife's requisition of him to seek the servants for her, comes to ask Vessantara for his two children. Therefore, he delivers over his children to Jujaka while his wife went to the forest for collecting food. The Maddi faints in sorrow upon when she knows to lose of her children. The following morning the king of the deities, Indra, fears of Vessantara will give away his better half in the next and be left lonely. As a result, he comes to meet the Vessantara in his disguise as a Brahmin form and asks for his wife, simply to give her back instantly. When obtained her back as a present, Vessantara is no more permitted by social convention to give her. In another episode, Jujaka and two children arrive at the King Sanjaya's court, where he ransoms his grandchildren and Jujaka dies of overeating. The king takes his entourage to the mountains and requests Vessantara and Maddi to return, and they do so in a grand procession. The entire stories derived from Indian tradition, the tale has ended with happiness. The family has united again, the total of Prince Vessantara's properties is returned to him.

#### Objective of The Study:

1. To Study the moral from Vessantara story
2. To examine the Vessantara's generosity to the others

### **The Significance of the Study:**

The study will show the moral and generosity of Vessantara Jataka. It was beliefs that Vessantara was the Bodhisatta who collected merit and Parami for becoming the Buddha in the future. The moral and generosity are one of the Buddha's teachings in Buddhism. This research will be studied and analyzed the moral and generosity of the protagonists to people of this story. This story also wants to teach people to know giving, donation, helping, sacrifice and saving the others from dangers which are making merit and Parami for support him in the next life. Although sometimes he gives everything he possesses to the others who come to beg from him until he gets troublesomeness, even his wife and two children, he still makes a strong mind for being the Buddha in the future. In the face of its righteously disturbing the central or most important feature, when the protagonist gives his two children away as slaves, the story is widespread as the matter of sermons, art, literature and ritual. Annual ritual recitations or performing a role in an event that occurred at an earlier time and goes on across Southeast Asia.

### **Scope and Limitation of the Study:**

In this research article, the Researcher selects the moral and generosity to the others in Vessantara Jataka to analysis and examine his collection merit and Parami according to the Buddha's teachings in Theravada Buddhism. Making goodness is consider as a good benefit and it will pave the way to the ultimate goal of Buddhism, Nirvana.

### **Research Methodology: data collection and analysis:**

In this study, the researcher studied and collected information from many sources, for example, books, electronic books, articles, Jataka commentary, researches related to the Jataka Tales. And an electronic data on analysis of characters in Vessantara Jataka. The result of the study will be reported in a descriptive form.

### **Moral and Generosity in Vessantara Jataka:**

The Vessantara Jataka is the last and most popular of the Jataka tales. A numbered list around 550, the Jatakas (birth stories) are among the most antique and largest compilation of tales in the world. In these birth stories, the Buddha was born in numerous different forms, not only as human beings but also frequently as animals. The stories normally cover a moral and they show the significant part in communicating the teachings of Buddha and valuable lessons. In the Vessantara Jataka, the Buddha was born as a Prince Vessantara, a very charitable prince who donated the whole thing to support others. His performs demonstrate the moral of generosity (dana), in Buddhism the word “Parami” (Paramita in Sanskrit/ Parami in Pali) is usually translated as “perfection” or “transcendental the act of making something perfect”, which necessary to attain enlightenment. By giving in charity the whole thing to the others, the Bodhisattva reaches the “Perfection of Giving.” This is an essential part of the Ten Perfections essential to achieve enlightenment:

Giving, Moral Conduct, Renunciation, Wisdom, Energy, Patience,  
Truthfulness, Resolution, Loving-Kindness and Equanimity.

This “concept of Perfections or excellence” is illustrated in the Jataka Stories. The part of personal action is also the main theme in these tales. Whereas at first glimpse, the stories may appear like common fables, the scholar Naomi Appleton (Appleton, 2010, p. 2) states “they demonstrate the little by little pathway to perfection carried by the Buddha in his former incarnations”. However, they keep on persistent in the popular imagination due to the simple morals they adopt – religiousness and strictness. The behaviour of giving everything to the others of the Vessantara is measured as the main act of sacrifice which guides to attain enlightenment. These moralistic stories display a clear way to the disciples of the Buddha to reach that difficult to describe the concept of moksha (redemption).

The Vessantara-Jataka is represented as a man who attains the highpoint of his evolutionary walk in the direction of moral and knowledgeable excellence and proper to cross the last cavity that splits him from Buddhahood. Therefore, the last birth before he reincarnated in Tusita heaven is known as the Great Birth. Prince Vessantara had practised the ten principal virtues and realized the ten perfections,

which the Buddha had to fulfil in many lives. According to the tradition, as a result of this achievement, he was reborn in the Tusita heaven and from there he descended to the human world as a human being and lived his last life on earth as a perfect Buddha. Before becoming a Buddha, he is unavoidably subject to Karmic law and strives along the endless chain of nonstop existence. However, the troubles and penalty experienced through all the steps of life verified to be highly advantageous to the way leading to happiness, which in the long run he achieved at the end of his mortal career.

### **An Analysis of Moral and Generosity in this story:**

Enlightenment; a multifaceted notion in Buddhist deliberate thinking, it is normally thought of as a situation to which one reaches, where one stops to feel craving or hatred, and hence is ready to be free from karma and rebirth after one's life. To attain enlightenment is regularly deliberated as the highest moral capable of being imagined. In the position of Buddhist, the central emphasis in life is to take the actions essential to create the desire for the results of performing become weaker into nearly nothing so that enlightenment can be achieved. In the Vessantara Jataka, the analysis finds out the last human being life of the Buddha who takes in the form of Prince Vessantara. At the first time when we start to read the text, it can be seen through his benevolent and generous performances that Vessantara gazes at the wants and needs of others come first before his own, but when the story keeps on; our opinions and interpretations to the prince arise to alter. Driving away the longing and desire that one has is the path to enlightenment but when the Vessantara goes until he gives his own wife and children, it causes us to take into consideration if he is truly charitable and generous from the bottommost of his heart. It makes sure that the wish of Vessantara to enlightenment and that he takes to good reach to engage himself as if he is sincerely a charitable man. He gives his own wife and children to others that raises the question of if he truly provides the significance to his family or if he is only doing these activities to advantage himself.

In the part of the text where Prince approves to present his own children to the Brahmin, it can be seen that how he estimate the values of his family but the

only unavoidable point. While giving his own children away, the prince states to the Brahmin, “The state of being omniscient is more priceless to him than his own children.” (Hans, 2009, p. 16) According to Peter Harvey, he states that “the word “donate” is either in generousness or charity they are concerned to loving-kindness and compassion” (Harvey, 2012, pp. 103-104)

### **Giving charity in Vessantara Jataka:**

Giving charity in the position of basic Buddhist Ethics that shows liberality and saving other lives from suffering and destiny. They are quality of kindness in order to cultivate and reduce clinging of giver or donator and it will be the core of moral in Buddhism. But giving charity in Vessantara Jataka or making Paramitas with shows an image of the extreme giving, for instance, giving the white elephant Peccaya, that brought rain to Siviratttha, to Brahmins in another city. Already the Vessantara-Jataka itself voices criticism of the prince’s generosity. After the gift of the elephant, the citizens’ comment that it would have been appropriated for Vessantara to contribute food, drink, clothes and living places to Brahmins, but not the royal elephant. In addition, he gives two children, Kanha and Jali, to Brahmin and his wife to Indra who disguises himself in the form of Brahmin as well. This Jataka presents the last life of the Bodhisatta in collecting Paramitas after he has collected Paramitas completely then he goes to Dusita heaven. He lives in Dusita for a long time until he considers to descend to the human world in the form of Prince Siddharta. Finally, Siddharta attained enlightenment and become Buddha. It can be seen that the person who is the Buddha has to face the important borders and many obstacles, that is, sacrifice with donation such as his properties, organs, life, children and wife. If we deeply analysis of this Vessantara Jataka, we can found that these extremely giving cause frustration and have ambiguous moral a long history of Buddhism. In The Milinda Panha (Questions of King Milinda), lively discussion on Buddhist creed with inquiries and difficult situations posed by King Milinda, explains the giving of Vessantara that although Vessantara’s charity deserves for applause and admiration, it causes severe suffering to his wife and two children. Milinda king asks the Buddhist sage Nagasena that “Why does a person who wants to collect good deed causes the others suffering?”

(Pesala, 1998) Nagasena replies that sometimes one's making merit or good deed makes troublesomeness and suffering to the others, it considers one's able to get enough good deed. He further explains with an example of a person who makes wish merit by helps and supports disable person to many places when he takes disable person to the cart and he has to force and wipe an ox while moving from places to places. By this action makes suffering to the ox. In another example, the king collects tax from people who live in his kingdom so this action causes troublesomeness and difficulty to his people, but he needs to do this action even he feels piety on his people, especially, when the king makes a big good deed which can be considered the merit can take a person to heavenly kingdom. Nagasena further explains that the Vessantara's action can be regarded as a person who has already been gotten the merit or good deed even his wife and two children have to face suffering and difficulty. In addition, Nagasena further to give more reason that the Maddi herself pleasure and express gratitude with the Vessantara's making merit. However, if Kanha and Jali have full-grown enough, they may be accompanied by this action of Vessantara collect the Paramitas as well. Moreover, in the last of this story, Vessantara got everything that he gave to the others back to him. They lived together with happiness in the city of Sivi again. It is compensated for the entire lamentation and sorrow. According to Donald K. Swearer, he states "the person who should be more blamed than Vessantara is Brahmin is known as Jujaka" (Donald, 1990, p. 108) But we cannot deeply point out to the Nagasena's answer is enough for explanation and solving the problem in moral and virtue in Vessantara's charity or not but it should be noticed that Nagasena's answer is open many points which can be applied for background in analysis of giving charity, generosity and moral in Vessantara Jataka. At what happened, when the Vessantara has given his two children to Jutaka, the son raises a question to his father on what he has done as if his heart is made of stone. While listening to the gift of the children, the courtiers state their criticism, in that it is incorrect for Vessantara to perform this manner; he can make a gift of slaves, animals, or a vehicle, but not his own children. A critical viewpoint finds to say again in the Milindapanha. Setting the problem and difficult condition in concise terms, the question is: if someone provides a gift that makes an agony on others, does that gift

outcome in delight and guide to a celestial sphere? The dilemma marked by Milinda involves the primary moral standards of early Buddhist thought. The point he creates an approve that Vessantara wishes to obtain merit and boon, he could have offered himself as a present, in place of causing hurt on others by giving them away. The problem is although Vessantara has the authority to do with his own body whatsoever he wants, the power or right he has as a father over his children and as a husband over his wife accompanies with the responsibility to keep under the careful scrutiny of them. At least from the standpoint of primary Buddhist moral values, he has no right to give them away in a manner that obviously contains hurting and damaging them. These generosityes are battle with fundamental moral principles, it is no astonishment that misgivings remain to be remarked by the contemporary Theravadins. Gabaude notes that “the story has tangled and perplexed the East, especially, in Thailand, it has produced hot discussions amongst the intellectual and common opinions.” (Gabaude, 2016, p. 38)

In addition, there is a critical expression in Gabaude (Gabaude, 2016, p. 40) goes in specific on the Vessantara’s lack of success to achieve his moral sense of duties. Firstly, he is a king who defects to preserve the moral principles of kings’, that is to say, he fails to observe the countrywide attention” with a contribution to the royal elephant for his charity. Secondly, the Vessantara is a husband who lacks protection the virtue of husbands’ and he is far from guarding his wife which he lets her falls into difficulty and gives her away to another man as if she were not a human being at all. Thirdly, the Vessantara is a father who defects to keep the morality of fathers’ and he does not safeguard his children, however, he ignores to his two children when Jutaka are beating on them in front of him. Moreover, Ladwig reports from Laos about the remark on Vessantara that, “the more he provides something away, the more problematic and egoistic his generous goes. His effort for giving becomes a problem for other people and it creates great sorrow and distress. His extraordinary generosity is almost can compare to a type of sickness.” (Ladwig, 2016, p. 63)

In the points of this story, the Vessantara’s extraordinary generosity if we think in the secular world we found that the Vessantara ignores to respect the right of



human beings, for example, he gives his dear wife and two children to the others. But in the world of religion, these actions are full of wish for being the Buddha in order to help sentient beings from sufferings. According to Buddha's teachings, the Vessantara's action is to help the others and not his selfish at all, especially, when he becomes the Buddha he can teach and guide all living beings to come across the circle of life such as birth, ageing, pain and death. One who follows the Buddha's teachings can pause the sufferings and goes to nirvana, the ultimate spiritual goal in Buddhism.

### Conclusion and recommendations:

The stories archetypally cover a moral and they show the significant part in carrying Buddha's teachings and valuable lessons. The Vessantara is a very generous and benevolent person who donates everything to support others. His movements demonstrate the feature of generosity (dana), which in Buddhism is one of the 'perfections' (paramita / parami) essential to reach enlightenment. However, in the end, the entire family has come together happily. The Vessantara's action in collection Parami for being the Buddha in the future. However, the whole things he has done for the benefit and advantage of all living beings because when he has already become the Buddha he can help others to get rid of suffering and led them to nirvana by his teachings. Consequently, these making merits are not for him alone, in fact, he did everything for all people happiness in both the present world and the next world as well. In the next research article, it should do the work on how to avoid suffering in daily life by application from the Buddha's teachings.

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