

***Jataka* Tales and Moral Education: A Comparative Cultural Study of Buddhist Fables and Aesop's Fables**

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The fable tradition has been a powerful tool for moral education for millennia. The Buddhist *Jataka* Tales and the Greco-Roman Aesop's Fables constitute the major collections of fables in world literature, but in-depth comparative studies between these traditions are limited. This research examines how the narrative structures and ethical frameworks of these story traditions reflect the cultural goals of the Buddhist and Greco-Roman worlds. This study analyzes selected fables from the Pali *Jataka* and Aesop's Fables using the method of content inquiry. The analysis is conducted at the structural, thematic, and cultural philosophical levels. Therefore, *Jataka*'s three-part structure reflects karma and rebirth, whereas Aesop's simple structure imparts practical principles applicable in a present society. On the other hand, the *Jatakas* emphasize the perfection of charity, veracity, and patience virtues while the practical virtues such as diligence and prudence are represented by Aesop's fables. Besides, the character analysis indicated that *Jataka* characters are characters of Bodhisatta's behavior while human qualities/vices are manifested through Aesop's characters. The paper concluded that Aesop educates about how to succeed in this world and *Jatakas* teach how to leave the world behind. It is actually an expression of the profound cultural and philosophical difference between the anthropocentric rationality and the liberation-oriented cosmology of the Buddhist realm.

Keywords: *Jataka* tales, fables of Aesop, moral education, comparative literature, Paramita.

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1. Introduction

Throughout the millennia, storytelling has served as the most potent means of passing the cultural norms, moral values, and philosophical wisdom through generations in the human civilization (Winternitz, 1927). Of these narrative traditions, the parable has a particular place but in the context of moral education in particular. It contains deep teachings about human nature and social life using simple and involving tales, and animal characters are frequently given qualities of humans.

The Buddhist *Jataka* stories in the East and the fable of the ancient Greek Aesop in the West are two of the best final points of this tradition of parables in world literature. On the face of it, the two collections seem to be pursuing the same narrative approach to offer the reader an idea of the weaknesses, virtues and realities of the society. Upon closer inspection though one realizes that there is an underlying difference between the superficial similarities in terms of underlying philosophical goals, ethical structure and cultural worldview that they developed



out of (Handford, 1954).

They are found in the Jataka in the tenth book, the *Jatakapali* of the Sutta Pitaka of the Pali Tripitaka, and are a collection of stories about the life of Gautama Buddha in his wanderings in samsara as a bodhisattva, in 547 lives (Rhys Davids, 1925). The stories are not just stories that offer moral lessons, but also educational instruments that can be employed to instruct the general populace on the basic principles of Theravada Buddhist cosmology, including karma, rebirth and achieving the paramitas. Stories of Jataka have become part of the religious education, art, and culture of Theravada Buddhist nations, particularly in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar. The reason the Buddha preached the Jataka stories is as here expressed in the *Dhammapadattakatha*:

“*Atītaṃ āharitvā kathessāmi*” - It is a past story I will tell. (*Dhammapadattakatha*, 1.1)

This is a typical Buddhism narrative approach to describing the Dhamma through the correlation of a current event with a prior tale.

The Fables of Aesop on the other hand are an accreditation of Aesop a slave and a storyteller who is believed to have lived in ancient Greece between the years 620 and 564 BC. These stories have formed the basis of Western moral teachings and classical literature in more than 2500 years (Clayton, 2003). Aesop's fables focus primarily on the practical wisdom, prudence, and social ethics needed for success in worldly life. They often satirize the power struggles, deceit, and concepts of justice that exist in human society through the animal world (Handford, 1954).

While both of these fable traditions share a common didactic purpose, the differences in their underlying philosophical foundations, moral emphases, and ultimate goals are the primary area of inquiry for this study. Therefore, the central research question of this article is: "How do the narrative structures and ethical frameworks of the Jataka tales and Aesop's fables reflect the distinct cultural and emancipatory purposes of the Buddhist and Greco-Roman worlds, respectively?" This study argues, as a hypothesis, that although both traditions are educational, their

ultimate educational purposes are fundamentally different. Aesop's fables focus primarily on teaching practical social ethics and worldly wisdom, while the Jataka tales are designed to illustrate the development of the noble qualities (paramitas) necessary for spiritual liberation, such as charity, virtue, and patience.

This paper tries to explain this point of difference by a direct comparison of the chosen Jataka stories and the fables of Aesop. In the case of the *Seehachamma Jataka*, as in the Ass in the Lion Skin, the same theme of disguise and the discovery of what lies beneath it are used, however the moral lessons learned in each are different. The moral of Aesopian fable is quite a trite one that one must not pretend to be what he is not, or he will be embarrassed in the society. But in the *Jataka* it is more of a spiritual teaching on the karmic repercussions of bragging and deceiving other people. Moreover, this paper will also consider the influences of philosophical backgrounds like the Buddhist theory of karma, the realization of the paramitas, and the rebirth cycle of samsara on the storyline and moral lesson of the Jataka and the effects of anthropocentric rationality of the Greeks, the social justice ideas and pragmatism on the moral message of the fables by Aesop. Finally, this comparative study attempts to show how these two parable traditions are not simply collections of stories, but rather act as mirrors of the cultural and philosophical worldviews from which they emerged. Thus, it will simultaneously reveal both the universal power and cultural specificity of narrative in the transmission of moral education and cultural values.

2. Materials and Methods

This research adopts a qualitative, text-based comparative methodology. The primary sources for this study are selected stories from the *Jatakapali* of the Pali Tripitaka and a standard collection of Aesop's Fables. The selection of the stories occurs through thematic and structural parallels to be able to compare them directly. An example is of the *Seehachamma-Jataka* (Ja 189) and his counterpart, Aesop's The Donkey in the Lion Skin; and the *Sungsumara-Jataka* (Ja 208) and his analogue, The Monkey and the Crocodile.

The approach to analysis is guided by the literary theory, which concentrates on the structure of the narrative and archetypes of characters and by the comparative ethics, which concentrates on the moral lessons within every story. The analysis is done in three steps:

Structural analysis: the analysis of the narrative structure of both of the traditions. The structure of the jataka tales is usually triple, *pacchuppanavattu* (present story), *chuttavattu* (past story), and *samodhana* (connection), i.e. the characters of the present story identify with the characters of the past, Buddha. On the contrary, the fables of Aesop are generally straightforward, each told in a short story and with brief morals.

Thematic analysis: the identification of the basic virtues/vices we see in each collection. These involve classification of moral teachings (e.g., cunning vs. wisdom, worldly success vs. spiritual virtue).

Cultural-philosophical contextualization: Applying the results of structural and thematic analysis in the areas of the larger cultural and philosophical contexts of Buddhist India and ancient Greece.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Narrative Structure and Educational Intent

The structural differences between the Jataka tales and Aesop's Fables are the main way in which the clear educational purposes and cultural-philosophical foundations of these two collections are revealed. The three-part structure of the Jataka tales (*pacchuppannavattu*, *kusthavattu*, *samodhana*) is inherently didactic, and is deeply rooted in the Buddhist theory of karma, rebirth, and the cycle of samsara. A Jataka story starts with the *pacchuppannavattu*. In this case, the Buddha is provoked to narrate a story that happened in the past because of a certain circumstance in his present life, the conduct of a monk, or an inquiry of a devotee (Fausboll, 1877-1896, Vol. 2, p. 155). This construction is not a mere story, but a plan of describing karmic connections. Indicatively, as example, in the *Seehachamma Jataka* (J. 189) in a story where a monk of Jetavana Monastery brags of his family, wealth, and virtue, Buddha replies: "*Na*

ajanma vannava" - not born noble (J. 189, verse 10). The Buddha then tells a story of the past. There, he describes how a merchant disguised his donkey with a lion's skin to frighten other animals, but the donkey's true nature was revealed when he did this (Cowell, 1895, pp. 99-101).

The past is the heart of the Jataka story. There, the Bodhisattva is described as being born in various incarnations, as a human, an animal, or a god, and as having attained the virtues of wisdom, compassion, and charity in each incarnation. The narrative structure of this section is often written in verses (*gathas*), accompanied by *atthakathas* (descriptions). This narrative part is like an ordinary parable, although it is its true strength. In the section of the Samodhana the Buddha states: *Tena kālena gadabho ahoṣi ayaṃ mahattako bhikkhu, vaṇiḷo pana ahameva ahoṣiṃ* - (Ja. 189, *Samodhana*). This connection explains how past actions are karmically connected to present characters. It transforms the Jataka story from a simple moral tale into a profound Dharma lesson about a bodhisattva's long journey through the cycle of samsara, by teaching that karma is not simply a matter of Dhamma, but a reality that operates over many lives (Rhys Davids, 1925, pp. 188-195).

The depth of this three-part structure is evident in the Nidana Katha of the *Jatakapaliya*. It states that the Buddha was able to tell these stories because he had the knowledge of past lives (the knowledge of remembering past lives). "*Pubbenivāsānussati-jānene sabbañña-buddho appamādena jātakam katheti*" "By means of the knowledge of past lives, the omniscient Buddha, without delay, preaches the Jataka" (*Jatakapaliya*, Nidana Katha, p. 47). The emphasis here is that the Jataka stories are not mere fables or myths, but are Dhamma teachings based on the Buddha's actual past experiences.

In contrast, Aesop's fables are self-contained, ahistorical, and stand alone. The fable The Ass in the Lion Skin is grounded in its whole structure on a brief story and a moral lesson (epigram) (Handford, 1954, pp. 3738). The version is as follows: An ass finds a skin of lion, takes it off and starts to frighten other animals. However, with the blow of a puff of wind, his long ears are pulled out and everyone sees

precisely what he is. The epigram goes: "Fine clothes can cover, but foolish words will reveal a fool. This is an ethical teaching that is direct, practical, and social. No metaphysical system herein can be found of reincarnation and karmic continuity or of a spiritual path. Its purpose is not to illustrate a path to liberation, but to provide practical guidance for successful and prudent behavior in society. The message of Aesop's fable is: Do not try to pretend to be something you are not, for your true nature will eventually be revealed (Perry, 1952, pp. 358-360).

These structural differences reflect fundamental cultural-philosophical differences in both. According to the Buddhist theory of karma, events that occur in this life are the karmic consequences of actions performed in previous lives. The concept of "*purāṇam kammaṃ*" is the basis of the structure of the Jataka tales (Ed. 3, p. 67). The Buddha, in the *Samodhana* section, shows that present-day events are not random or merely mundane events, but rather part of a chain of karmic cause and effect. Thus, the Jataka story becomes a karmic educational tool that extends across time. In contrast, the Greek ethical tradition, especially Aesop's fables, focuses on worldly decision-making and social behavior in the present life. In Greek thought, arete (virtue or excellence) and eudaimonia (happiness or well-being) are things to be achieved in this world, not a spiritual goal to be achieved in a future life (Nussbaum, 1986, pp. 290-317).

3.2 Character Myths and their Anti-Emotional Place.

Jataka stories as well as the fables of Aesop extensively exploit the use of animal characters that exhibit human traits. Nevertheless, the fact that these animal characters are used with the purpose to represent symbolic meanings has a great difference with their intended use. The Bodhisattva is born in the Jataka stories as a rabbit (*Sasa Jataka* - Ja. 316), an elephant (*Maha Ummagga Jataka* - Ja. 546), a monkey (*Mahakapi Jataka* - Ja. 407) or a swan (*Hansa Jataka* - Ja. 533). In such incarnations of animals, the Bodhisattva is always kind, generous, truthful, and self-sacrificing. As an illustration, the Bodhisattva, who is born as a hare in the *Sasa Jataka*, is ready to burn himself on the fire in order to

feed the sacred deva (Cowell, 1895, Vol. 3, pp. 45-50). This story has a stanza that goes as follows: "*Modati ve sace jivama parassa hitakamiyaa, ya iddhanti attanama paranama atthakarino*" - he who is desirous of doing good to other men burns himself and does good to other men, is happy even if he lives. It is here that the focus is on the objective of self-sacrifice - the objective of self-sacrifice.

The animal characters in the Jataka stories are not just animals, they are the antitypical representatives of the bodhisattva's behavior. This is evident in Chinese Buddhist art, Tibetan thangkas, and South Asian Buddhist temple paintings. The animal characters in the Jataka tales depict the Bodhisattva as a being who is dedicated to the fulfillment of wisdom, compassion, and perfection, even in animal lives, on his journey to attaining a human self and eventually attaining Buddhahood (Ohnuma, 2007, pp. 75-82). This is related to the central concept of Buddhist thought, "All beings have the potential to become Buddhas". Even when born as an animal, the Buddha-nature within the Bodhisattva is manifested.

Conversely, the animal characters of the fables by Aesop are certain qualities or vices of a human nature. Fox is cunning and wise, wolf is cruel and powerful, lamb is innocent and weak and the crow is stupid and foolish (Perry, 1952, pp. 15-20). These are mythical characters and they usually fulfill a social reverse. Indeed, in the story, "The Fox and the Grapes," the fox attempts to do with grapes he cannot access citing, they will turn sour anyway (Handford, 1954, pp. 35). The moral of the story is: "People overestimate what they are not able to obtain. Fox is a characteristic of humans in this story that is curbed by self-deception. It is a critical commentary that exhibits some specific scheme of human life, however, not of a karmic or spiritual way (Zafiroopoulos, 2001, pp. 98-105).

3.3 Ethical Framework

The underlying discrepancy between the Jataka stories and the fables by Aesop is the ethical principle. The Jataka stories are allegedly created to show the ten paramitas, or perfections, which a bodhisattva ought to meet during his or her way to enlightenment: (dana - generosity), (*sillab* -

morality), (*nekkhamma* - renunciation of craving), (*pañña* - wisdom), (*virīya* - effort), (*khanti* - patience), (*sacca* - truthfulness), (*adhiitthana* - determination), (*mettata* - loving-kindness), and (*upeska* - equanimity) (Budd Such paramitas are not just normal moral qualities, but are the utmost qualities required in order to traverse the ocean of samsara and reach enlightenment. In the *Kariyapannika Jataka*, the paramitas are described as follows: (*dānaṃ sīlaṃ tapo cāgo adhiṭṭhānaṃ ajjhasayo khanti ca saccaṃ sammā karonti parimiya thammassā*) "By the proper fulfillment of charity, virtue, austerity, sacrifice, determination, devotion, patience and truthfulness, the paramitas of the Dhamma are fulfilled" (*Kariyapannika Jataka*, stanza 8).

For example, the Vessantara Jataka (j. 547), is an epic illustration of the perfect paramitas of charity. Here, Prince Vessantara (the Bodhisattva) donates the meritorious *cintamani* of his kingdom to the elephants of the lineage. Thus, the men get angry and kick him out. Both, however, Prince Vessantara, who is heading to the forest, sells his chariot, horses and every material wealth to a nobleman. At the forest, Vessantara kills his two children in response to a Brahmin requesting that his children serve his parents. Finally, when the sacred deity appears in the guise of a Brahmin and asks for Prince Vessantara's wife, Madri, Vessantara is ready to sacrifice her too (Cowell, 1907, Vol. 6, pp. 246-310). This radical self-sacrifice is not merely a worldly generosity, but an expression of a steadfast effort towards ultimate goals, completely free from self-attachment. In Buddhism, this is associated with the concepts of "*cāga*" (the removal of craving) and "*anattā*" (the non-self). Prince Vessantara, free from the mental structures of "I", "my children", "my wife", and acting on the understanding that everything is impermanent and non-self (Harvey, 2000, pp. 57-62).

Similarly, the *Maha-Sutasoma Jataka* (Jataka 537), is an illustration of the Perfect True Paramita. Here, King Sutasoma (the Bodhisattva), when the demon king "*Porisadha*" comes to devour him, promises to return after a certain period of time to see his children, and after going to the city and telling his

children his last words, returns to the demon king at the appointed time (Cowell, 1907, Vol. 5, pp. 456-478). The demon, noticing so remarkable verisimilitude, does not swallow the king, and becomes his trapper. According to the stanza in this story: (*sacca m ve parama m tapo*) - Truth is the supreme austerity (Ja. 537, stanza 32). This story is an example of the highest level of ethics, in which death is not even a danger to the truth. It is highly opposite to practical ethics where one can lie to save their life.

On the contrary, practical, worldly virtues are celebrated by fables of Aesop. The moral (The Ant and the Grasshopper) glorifies the importance of hard work, foresight and use of planning. When it is summer, the ant hoards food as the grasshopper wastes time singing. The ant has food in winter, and the grass hopper demands that the ant should give him food. The ant declines: "You sang in summer, dance in winter" (Perry, 1952, pp. 112-114). The lesson to this is: people who squander their time in pleasure without considering the present will have it hard in the future. It is not regarding spiritual liberation or completion of the paramitas but practical wisdom of life.

Likewise the tale The Tortoise and the Hare glorifies the value of the continuity of effort. The rabbit races the tortoise and challenges him. The hare confident in his speed falls asleep half way. The dawdling tortoise emerges the victor in the race. Lesson: with slow and steady, you do win the race (Handford, 1954, pp. 78-79). Although this is a very admirable teaching, it is concerned with rather self-evident secular success.

It also is true that virtues like honesty are glorified in the fables of Aesop, however, through the prism of their social value. Cunning and cleverness are often praised like in The Fox and the Crow. On seeing a bit of cheese in the mouth of the crow, the fox praises him because he has a beautiful voice. It slips out of the mouth of the crow, who is pleased to hear it, causing the piece of cheese to fall out and the fox takes it (Perry, 1952, pp. 228-230). Moral lesson: "Be not trusting to flatterers. Although the cunning

of the fox is criticized, the fox is praised as well regarding his cleverness.

3.4 Extreme Views and the Middle Approach: Cultural Ethical Differences

Another fundamental difference between the Jataka tales and Aesop's fables is their approach to extreme behavior and wrong views. According to the Middle Approach of Buddhism, both the extreme views (*eternalism* - everything is permanent and eternal) and nihilism (there is nothing after death) are wrong. The Jataka tales describe the fulfillment of the paramitas and the consequences of karma, and this middle approach is consistently presented. The existence of karmic continuity, although not the soul, is evident from the structure of the Jataka tales. Although the Bodhisattva is reborn in different forms in different soul states, there is a continuous flow of meritorious deeds.

Extreme behavior is also represented as social evil in the fables of Aesop. As an example, in *The Dog and the Shadow*, there comes a moment when the dog in the story crosses a bridge with a piece of meat in his mouth and because he sees his own reflection in the water he believes that the other dog has a smaller piece of meat. The gluttony dog, which barks to steal the piece of meat, reaches the water and loses his piece of meat (Handford, 1954, pp. 56). The moral of this is: "Know everything, lose everything. It is a lesson to do in practice what greed brings. But there is no spiritual allegory in the fable of Aesop when he talks of destroying the root of evil like the greed of Buddhism. Aesop preaches that greed is socially and worldly evil in its excess form. Jataka stories provide that greed is a samsara chain and that it should be shattered off with an act of generosity.

3.5 Rituals, religious Rituals and Social Utility

Jataka tales are not merely a literary piece of works in the Theravada Buddhist society, but a component of the religious rituals, merit-making, and social identities. In other countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar, the Vessantara Jataka is a merit-making festival, which is conducted during a week in temples annually. The public gathers and listens to the Vessantara Jataka all night

long, witnessing the extraordinary virtue of giving, and generating merit. Jataka tales are depicted in temple paintings, depicting bodhisattvas, and are used as visual educational tools. This is the way Buddhism is accessible and brought to life by the common people.

The fables by Aesop have also come to form part of moral education in Western society. Since the Greco-Roman eras up to the present, Aesop fables have formed the staple of school syllabuses of children. They are applied to teach the practical wisdom, social behavior, and life skills. Yet, the fables of Aesop do not relate to religious practices. They are secular literature and need not believe in religion. This is an indication of the religion-morality divide in the Western society.

4. Literature Review

The academic literature regarding the comparative analysis of the Aesop fables and the Jataka tales belongs to a very broad range of multidisciplinary disciplines, but the most influential are comparative literature studies, Buddhist studies, the study of ethical philosophy, and the study of folk literature. T. W. A book on *Buddhist India*, written in 1925, by Rhys Davids is widely considered to be a landmark work in trying to explain the historical and cultural background of the Jataka stories in the Buddhist literature tradition. Rhys Davids held that the Jataka stories cannot be applied strictly to religious literature but must be treated as historical records of the social life, economic life and cultural life of the ancient Indian society. He especially emphasizes the role of the Jataka stories which, rather than being a part of a written tradition, were originally an oral culture and only later were marked into the Pali Canon, and only later were edited and updated by a Buddhist monastic tradition during and after the Buddha and later. The work by Rhys Davids therefore highlights the reality that the Jataka stories were not necessarily meant to offer moral education but as a way of passing down deep teachings in respect to karma, rebirth and the way to be the bodhisattva as Buddhism cosmology. This provides the historical-cultural contextualization that the modern scholarly study of the Jataka tales needs, including an overview of the religious, social, and

philosophical backgrounds of their composition.

The structure and narration of the Jataka tales is brought into the light of the book *A History of Indian Literature* by M. Winternitz, 1927, Vol. 2. As pointed out, the three parts of a Jataka story—*pacchuppannavatthu*, *chuttavatthu*, *samodhana*—develop into an unparalleled vehicle of Buddhist doctrinal teaching. He then points out that this structure illustrates how karmic connections are made between the past and the present and how paramitas are gradually filled through the different incarnations of the bodhisattva. Winternitz adds that the stories were among the greatest favorites in Pali literature and had a profound influence on Buddhist art, craft, and culture in South and Southeast Asia. His study further goes on to prove that the fables of Aesop were an essential part of Greek and Roman educational systems, used not only as a mode of imparting knowledge amongst the younger set but also imparting knowledge amongst adults of the world on how one must go about navigating the world with the wisdom that these fables imparted. Perry further delves into the variations that existed amongst the fables of Aesop across various versions that existed over the years. The English translation of "Fables of Aesop" by S. A. Handford published under Penguin Classics in the year 1954 is an extremely valuable study that makes the fables of Aesop accessible to the masses. As Handford begins his foreword, "Fables of Aesop" are definitely not childlike tales; they tend directly toward the social, the political, the moral plight of Greek and Roman culture. He further writes that the "toga" that precedes every fable may at times tend toward the trite and the practical but rests on the back of every fable an intense knowledge of the nature of humans, of the nature that prevails over power and of the relationship that prevails amongst humans. He further writes that the fables of Aesop "are practical guides on how one may succeed well in the world; and they have little or nothing at all to do with the release of the spirit or the realms of metaphysical reasoning." This study further serves as a starting point into how the fables of Aesop rank amongst the sayings of the West regarding the moral education imparted amongst the masses.

A very useful source of information on the Buddhist ethical system and its terminology is the book "An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics" published by Peter Harvey in 2000. This book introduces readers to the Buddhist ethical system based on the principles of the theory of karma, the process of samsara, and the attainment of nirvana. Additionally, the threefold system of practice proposed by the Buddha—a path consisting of the practice of "*sila*" (Morality), "*samadhi*" (Concentration), and "*paññā*" (Wisdom) on the path of liberation—receives considerable attention. Further discussion regarding the nature of Buddhist ethics and their application on the path of the bodhisattva toward the development of the highest levels of character traits of "charity," "samsara," and "equanimity" occurs. Finally, the Buddhist ethical system's distinction of the desire for enlightenment over the attainment of worldly goods receives attention relative to Western ethical systems according. This source proves very helpful in building the proper foundations regarding the ethical system represented through the "Jataka" series.

"Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature" by Rina Onuma, published in the year 2007, provides a detailed analysis of the topic of self-sacrifice (*deha dana*) as portrayed in the Jataka narratives. Onuma focuses on various narratives of the Jataka series that revolve around the sacrifice of the bodhisattva's body parts or life, and how these narratives depict the highest levels of the Buddhist ideology of '*anatma*' (no-self), '*anitya*' (impermanence), and '*karuna*' (great compassion) through the act of extreme sacrifice. Onuma asserts that these narratives depict the Buddhist perception of the ever-changing nature of the body and its lack of meaning or significance; thus, the bodhisattva victorious over the 'self,' with the help of the act of 'self-surrender,' strictly sticks to the well-being of others. Onuma's discussion further continues with the explanation of how these narratives promote the utmost knowledge of the 'paramita of giving principle' within the Buddhist community; thus, the act of 'self-surrendering' takes precedence over the surrendering of material possessions. Onuma's essay develops the understanding of how the 'self-sacrifice principle' under the Jataka narratives manifests the utmost

elements of the Buddhist philosophical system; thus, the narratives possess an enormous potential in the respective fields of cultural, religious, and moral education. The book *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* was published in 1986 by Martha C. Nussbaum, and it presents the reader with the world of the Greek ethics and Greek philosophical thought. Nussbaum is interested in the way the tension of ethics and the reality of human vulnerability, chance, and events of human life are embodied in the Greek tragedies and in the writings of Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Nussbaum states that Greek ethics are worldly-centered; human relationships and participation in the world are the essence of the right life; but these aspects too are marked by the intrinsic fragility of luck and external events. Nussbaum specifically points out that the Greek conception of arete (virtue or excellence) corresponds with the full development of the individual's potential and that this conception of arete is closely bound up with the social and political aspects of human existence. Nussbaum's observations help the reader understand the world of Greek ethics. Greek ethics differ greatly from Buddhist ethics because Greek ethics specialize on worldly success and the establishment of world peace. This particular book on the ethics of the Greeks is very important because it forms the philosophical foundations of the morals that are being transmitted through the Aesopic fables.

The book, *Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective*, by David R. Kinsley (1996) offers a valuable source of information on cultural and religious background of the Indian people who told the Jataka tales. Kinsley explains the ways in which the Indian culture of karma, dharma (moral duty) and moksha (liberation) shape the social organization, religious practices and behaviors of individuals. As Kinsley notes, Buddhism, despite being based on the Hindu tradition, was very challenging to it, especially, denying the varnashrama (caste system), and stressing personal merit and spiritual effort. Kinsley also explains how the Jataka tales relate to the larger tradition of Indian storytelling, especially the Panchatantra and the *Hitopadesha*, and the interdependence which existed between the two. The work of Kinsley describes the role of the Jataka

stories in forming a Buddhist identity within the Indian culture and the role the stories played in the overall Indian oral traditions.

In 2016, the publication *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, with editors Kaja F. O'Brien and David L. Fox, is a guide to the contemporary theories and approaches of narrative analysis. The book outlines the different methods of analysis of narrative structure, character development, plot, and narrative purpose. O'Brien and Fox demonstrate that narrative analysis is a very effective method to learn how stories can express cultural values as well as social relations. They specifically highlight the role of narrative structure in creating meaning and effect of the story and the way characters communicate mythological, symbolic, and cultural messages. This book gives a theoretical framework of applying narrative analysis tools in the comparison of the Jataka stories and Aesop fables so that the researchers can systematically analyze the structural and thematic characteristics of both the traditions.

The book *Nagarjuna in Context* by Stephen C. Walker (2005) discusses the rise of Mahayana Buddhism as well as the philosophy of Nagarjuna within the Indian cultural and intellectual context. Walker explains how Mahayana tradition emerged due to ideological discussions, social transformation, and the focus on the ideal of bodhisattva in Buddhism. Walker believes that the Jataka stories were significant in the evolution of Mahayana bodhisattva ideal, and that they offered a practical path to enlightenment through demonstrating the compassion of the bodhisattva, his wisdom and celestial self-sacrifice. Walker also talks of how the Mahayana idea of liberating all beings was spread based on the Mahayana ideal of the bodhisattva as portrayed in the Jataka stories. According to Walker, this work describes the significance of the Jataka tales to both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, and how the tales are a subset of larger historical and philosophical trends in the history of Buddhist philosophy and practice.

The 2001 work *Ethics in Aesop fables: the Augustana collection* by Anikshat Zafiroopoulos is a detailed study of how Aesop in his fables addressed the topic of ethics and how they were received during

the Roman and the medieval era. Zafiropoulos discusses the translation of the fables of Aesop, the way fables were translated into Latin, and introduced into Roman culture and education. He especially accentuates the way the Roman versions of the fables of Aesop transformed the teachings about morals to the values and aims of Roman society. Zafiropoulos states that in the Middle Ages the fables of Aesop were assimilated with the Christian morals and he demonstrates the fact that they were taught in churches and preached. He also clarifies that the fables of Aesop are malleable stories and can be applied to various cultural and religious situations, and the morality of the stories can be construed in various ways across different societies. The work by Zafiropoulos describes the way in which the Aesopian fables have been used universally as a moral educational instrument in the Western world, and the way in which this message has been productively repackaged in various cultural and religious systems.

The above literature review shows that research on the Jataka tales and Aesop's fables spans a variety of disciplines. The works of Rhys Davids and Winternitz provide a basic understanding of the historical, cultural, and literary context of the Jataka tales, while the works of Perry, Handford, and Clayton describe the origin, transmission, and role of Aesop's fables in Western culture. The works of Harvey and Onuma provide a deeper understanding of Buddhist ethics and the theme of self-sacrifice in the Jataka tales, while Nussbaum's work provides an analysis of Greek ethics and philosophy. The works of Kinsley and Walker describe the broader Indian and Buddhist cultural context in which the Jataka tales originated, and the works of O'Brien and Fox provide a theoretical framework for narrative analysis. Finally, Zafiropoulos's work explains how Aesop's fables have been adapted in different cultural and religious contexts. These collections provide a scientific basis for the multidisciplinary, comparative study of Jataka tales and Aesop's fables, hence are the fundamental sources for the theoretical, methodological, and analytical approaches of this study. However, this scholarly review of the literature discloses that direct, in-depth comparisons of the two traditions-which would amount to a

proper, systematic comparison of structural, thematic, and ethical similarities and differences between them, are few. Few scholars have investigated each tradition in isolation, but have not made an appropriate and systematic comparison. Therefore, this study tries to fill this lacuna in the existing scholarly literature by giving a clear comparison between the two traditions. In particular, the present study underlines the fact that despite superficial similarities in the two fable traditions, their implicit objectives are substantially different: whereas Aesop's fables aim at worldly success through practical wisdom, the Jatakas focus on spiritual salvation and attainment of paramitas. This vital difference speaks volumes about important philosophical and cultural dissimilarities in the worldviews between the Greco-Roman and Indo-Buddhist cultures.

This literature review further indicates that mere content comparison is not sufficient in comparing Jatakas and Aesop's fables, but rather, the cultural, religious, and philosophical contexts in which these fables were created have to be understood. Rice Davids, Winternitz, Kinsley, and Walker attribute the root of the Jataka tales to Buddhist cosmology, karmic thought, and the bodhisattva ideal. Nussbaum, Perry, Handford, and Zafiropoulos explain that Aesop's fables represent Greco-Roman ethics, rationality, and social values. Harvey, Onuma, and Nussbaum have explained the fundamental difference between Buddhist and Greek ethics: Buddhist ethics focuses on spiritual liberation, while Greek ethics focuses on worldly success. O'Brien and Fox have explained how narrative structure shapes story meaning and thereby helps to explain the difference between the three-part structure of the Jataka tales and the simple structure of Aesop's fables. This literature review thus concludes that though there is a strong scholarly grounding for a comparative study between the Jataka tales and Aesop's fables, direct, in-depth comparison is limited. The present research paper, therefore, intends to fill that lacuna in the existing scholarly literature and contribute to an expanded understanding of how fables transmit traditions, cultural values, and philosophical worldviews by systematically presenting a structural, thematic,

ethical, and cultural-philosophical comparison between the two traditions.

5. Conclusion

This comparative study, by systematically examining the structural, thematic, and ethical similarities and differences between the two fable traditions, the Jataka tales and Aesop's fables, has revealed profound differences in the cultural and philosophical worldviews from which these traditions emerged. The central finding of this research is that although both traditions use humanized animal characters to convey moral advice, their ultimate educational goals are fundamentally different. Aesop's fables focus primarily on worldly success, social behavior, and practical wisdom, while the Jataka tales focus on the attainment of the paramitas, an essential part of the path to spiritual liberation.

As for the narrative structure, the three-tier structure of the Jataka stories (*pacchuppannavatthu*, *kusthavatthu*, *samodhana*) made them an excellent narrative tool for deepening the understanding of Buddhist karma theory and rebirth. In this light, present events are connected with past karmic actions, reflecting the long path of a bodhisattva through a number of lives. By contrast, Aesop's fables are based on an independent, short narrative with a clear moral lesson (epimethium), and their emphasis was in giving practical recommendations for present life. Such a difference in the structural level reflects a difference in the basic understanding of time and spiritual goals in each tradition.

From the point of view of ethical frameworks, it would appear from this research that the Jataka stories are explicitly designed to exemplify the ten virtues which a bodhisattva is supposed to cultivate: charity, virtue, goodness, wisdom, fortitude, patience, truth, determination, compassion, and equanimity. The Vessantara Jataka, the Maha Sutasoma Jataka, and the Sasha Jataka represent the virtues of charity, truth, and self-sacrifice in extreme forms and stress the fact that these virtues are to be cultivated, not for worldly gain, but for liberation from the bonds of samsara. Aesop's fables, on the other hand, praise worldly virtues like diligence,

foresight, prudence, and social adjustment and furnish useful practical guidelines for success in this world.

Further analysis of character myths showed that the animal characters in Jataka tales are the antithetical representatives of the Bodhisattva behavior that illustrates the Buddha nature of all beings and their potential for enlightenment. The animal characters in Aesop's fables are the definitive antithetical characters representing specific human qualities or vices used to critique social and human behavioral patterns.

The most significant discovery in this research is that either of these story traditions acts as a mirror of the respective cultural-philosophical worldviews in which the traditions emerged. The worldview of Indo-Buddhism is based on the cycle of samsara, karma, and moksha. Success in the world is thus not the aim of life but, rather, liberation from samsara. On the other hand, the Hellenic worldview is world-centered, and regards human rationality, arete, and eudaimonia as those things to be achieved in this world. This generates a basic philosophical difference that shapes the moral message, the narrative structure, and the characterization in each tradition.

Another important contribution of this paper is the finding that, while the Jataka tales and Aesop's fables are similar in structure, their meanings and purposes are essentially different. This finding is significant in understanding how cultural values and philosophical worldviews shape narrative traditions. It further points out that there could be a "universal" story structure, but the cultural interpretation could be very diverse.

Notably, the pragmatic implication of this research is very significant too. Through this study, it is portrayed that moral education can be undertaken in various ways across different cultures. In a multicultural society, Jataka tales and Aesop's fables offer the best means of introducing different ethical approaches and worldviews. This goes a long way in fostering appreciation of cultural diversity and an understanding of different moral frameworks.

For future research directions, this study suggests

several. First, a comparison with other Indian fable traditions such as the Jatakas, Panchatantra, and *Hitopadesha* helps to understand the uniqueness of Buddhist stories within the Indian storytelling tradition. Second, there is practical value in exploring how the Jatakas and Aesop's fables can be used in modern moral education. Third, a cultural acceptance study of how these story traditions have been received and adapted in different cultures would be very useful.

This comparative study can conclude that the Jatakas and Aesop's fables are outstanding representatives of the fable tradition, stating the values of the cultural and philosophical worldviews from which they came. Aesop teaches how to overcome in the world; the Jatakas teach how to go beyond the world. This fundamental difference reflects the diverse approaches to moral education and spiritual development in human civilization and is exemplary for both the universal power and cultural specificity of storytelling.

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