

From Outcast to *Arhat*: A Discussion of Human Dignity in the Buddhist *Jātaka*



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Abstract

The present paper aims to analyze, through the category of Buddhist Sūtras, more specifically the Jātaka No. 41, the process of inclusion in Buddhist communities of social outcasts in ancient India. It presents how Buddhist communities, inspired by the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, brought about change in the paradigm of Indian *varṇas*. It will explore the story of Losaka, preserved in Buddhist canons, an outcast subject to no rights and no voice, who is welcomed into the Buddhist community through *Śāriputra*, a being accepted inside a community that offered support and brought back his dignity as a human being. Losaka's tale is an important reminder of how human outcasts, considered unworthy and therefore excluded from societies, can regain their human dignity and become arhats. The paper intends to contribute to the study of Buddhist texts as sources for understanding the social changes that Buddhadharma brought to India. This also provides us with alternatives to the analyses of the existence of human dignity in Buddhist traditions as well as the possibility to use Buddhist theories in the analysis of social structures of our time, notably with the rise of movements against human dignity and human rights.

Keywords

Buddhist ethics, Human Rights, Jātaka, Jātaka-mālā, Losaka-tiṣya, Losaka

In a broad sense, Buddhism is the term used to indicate a religious and philosophical system based on the teachings of Siddhārta Gautama (or, in Pali, Siddhattha Gotama), known as the Buddha Śākyamuni. After the *parinirvāna* of the Buddha, historical events led to the birth of many different traditions and systems.¹ This brought forth a vast variety of Buddhist texts and canons,

¹ *Parinirvāna* means the final or complete *nirvāna* that occurred after the Buddha's passing, which implies the complete cessation of the cycle of sufferings.

existing in many different languages, mostly because of the efforts of translators and scholars. Consequently, what we may perceive as Buddhism is in fact *Buddhisms*.

There are many different canons in different languages, all of which can have different interpretations of the Buddhist scriptures. However, in Western countries, we still have a long way to go in terms of having full access to the translation of Buddhist texts. Translating Buddhist texts is not an easy task, and even though efforts are being made, if we take the Tibetan canon for instance, roughly five percent have been translated.² This means that the world of Buddhism(s) as we know it is a fragment of what actually exists, and in order to explore it there is a dire need for learning instrumental languages. Among the many extant Buddhist canons, we find myriad sources dealing with the topic of social outcasts and the matter of inclusion. One particular source, namely the *Losaka-jātaka*, is important to analyze because it provides elements to understand human dignity in a Buddhist perspective. This essay intends to examine the *Losaka-jātaka* (Jātaka 41) on the topic of social change. With that in mind, these tales can be analyzed in dialogue with Western notions of human dignity and in a challenging time for human rights, dignity, and universal responsibility today.

Diving into the Jātaka Genre: Situating the *Losaka-jātaka*

The Jātaka genre is present not only in the Sutta-piṭaka of the Buddhist Pali canon but can also be found in the Vinaya category. Dating this genre of texts can be a very difficult task and is also not the objective of this essay, so we will adopt the dates listed by Edward Byles Cowell and Robert Chalmers, viz., 380 BC to 400 AD.³

The Jātaka genre consists of 550 texts in the Theravāda canon, but only 547 have survived.⁴ They are preserved in the Chinese Canon as well, and some of these texts have been translated later into Tibetan from Pali and Chinese sources.⁵ It is not certain whether some specific Jātaka tales have been indeed translated to Tibetan,⁶ so this essay will focus only on the

² See the project known as *84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha*, <http://84000.co>

³ Cowell and Chalmers mention those dating possibilities in *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895), viii.

⁴ See Viggo Fausbøll, *The Jātaka, Together with its Commentary, being Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha*, Vol. 7 (London: Trübner and Co., 1877), ix. The Jātaka texts that are considered apocrypha are not being here analyzed, since the *Losaka-jātaka* is regarded as a traditional or canonical tale.

⁵ See Sean Gaffney, *Skyes pa rabs kyi gleng gzi Jātakanidāna: prologue to the birth stories: an English translation of a critical edition based on six editions of the Tibetan bKa' 'gyur* (Oxford: Indica et Buddhica, 2019).

⁶ Gaffney in his mentioned work gives a helpful hint regarding the selected texts that were translated from Pali to Tibetan, in his footnotes 5 (27). He also states in the introduction to Chapter One that his translation is of a work considered apocryphal (12) because, in the Tibetan canon, སྐྱེས་པ་རལ་ཀྱི་གླེང་གཞི་ (*skyes pa rabs kyi gleng gzhi*) is not the Jātaka tales itself, but the introduction to the Jātaka, since the word གླེང་གཞི་ (*gleng gzhi*) means introduction, or in Sanskrit *nidāna*. Gaffney states that other twelve texts were translated to Tibetan from Pali, but in his list of titles there is no mention to the full extension of Jātaka tales. Searching in the Buddhist Digital Archives, in the Tibetan canon it seems there is besides the *Jātaka-nidāna* only the following: སྐྱེས་པ་འི་རལ་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་ཅེར་བཤད་པ་ (*skyes pa'i rabs kyi rgya cher bshad pa*) or *Jātaka-mālā-tīkā*; སྐྱེས་པ་འི་རལ་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་དཀར་འགྲེལ་ (*skyes pa'i rabs kyi rgyud kyi dka' 'grel*) or *Jātaka-mālā-pañjikā*; སྐྱེས་པ་རལ་ཀྱི་བསྟོད་པ་ (*skyes pa rabs kyi bstod pa*) or Eulogy to the Jātaka, and; སྐྱེས་པ་འི་རལ་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་ (*skyes pa'i rabs kyi rgyud*) or *Jātaka-mālā*. Since the Jātaka tales, as well as the *Losaka-jātaka* seems absent in the Tibetan canon, we will assume it was not translated, but similar narratives can be found. See Seishi Karashima and Margarita I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, eds., *Buddhist Manuscripts*

extant version of the text in Pali and Chinese. There is also another version of the Jātakas, with 34 tales, the *Jātaka-mālā* from Āryasūra, which is also available in English to Western readers. Since the specific genre of Buddhist tales is vast, and many different versions exist in the different canons, there is much yet to explore on this subject.⁷

The Jātaka tale that is the object of study of this essay is the *Losaka-jātaka*, also known as *Mittavinda-jātaka*, present in the Ekanipāta. It was translated from Pali to English by Chalmers in 1895 and is present at Fausbøll's edition on the Jātakas in 1877. The Chinese version of this Jātaka is named 羅沙伽長老本生經 (*Luóshājiā zhǎnglǎo běn shēng jīng*), which can be translated into English as the *Sūtra that Recounts the Life of Elder Luóshājiā*, but can also be found in CBETA (Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association) under a similar name 羅沙伽長老本生譚 (*Luóshājiā zhǎnglǎo běn shēng tán*), which can be translated as the *Tale that Recounts the Life of Elder Luóshājiā*.⁸ The *Losaka-jātaka*, as pointed out earlier can also be called *Mittavinda-jātaka*, since the Pali text affirms Losaka is in another lifetime Mittavindaka, a character that has another Jātaka associated with him⁹.

However, there is also another important association to Elder Losaka (*Losaka-tiyya* in Sanskrit or *Losaka-tissa* in Pali), that can be seen when analyzing the discovery of the *Avadāna* manuscript in Merv Oasis, in present-day Turkmenistan.¹⁰ This manuscript was discovered in 1965, when fragments of Buddhist texts were found in the Merv Oasis in Turkmenistan, which can be traced back to the 5th century C.E. Studies show that it is most likely to have been written and preserved by proponents of a Sarvāstivādin school.¹¹ One of the fragments presents the tale of Lakumcika, known as the “hunchback,” that can be understood as a similar version of Losaka's tale. Karashima and Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya provide correlations between stories as presented in different works.¹² Inspired by the table created by both Karashima and Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, we will provide in which texts the tales regarding Lakumcika are mentioned, and its similarities with the *Losaka-jātaka*.

The first text mentioned in Karashima and Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya is the *Story of Small Person with a Curving Spine* or དགེ་སྤོང་སྤྱར་རྩུང་གི་གཏམ་རྒྱུད་ (*dge slong sgur chung gi gtam rgyud*), one of the tales present in the *Karmaśataka* of the Derge Kangyur.¹³ The second text is preserved in the

from *Central Asia—The St. Petersburg Sanskrit Fragments (StPSF)*, Vol. I. (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, 2015).

⁷ There are many books analyzing the *Jātaka* literature. For further reading: Naomi Appleton, *Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism: Narrating the Bodhisatta Path* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).

⁸ Present in the CBETA database, available for consultation online. The *Losaka-jātaka* is at page 197 of the PDF archive: <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/sutra/N/N0018.pdf>.

⁹ This information can be found in Fausbøll's edition of the Pali text. See Fausbøll, *The Jātaka*, Vol. I, 241.

¹⁰ For the results of the analysis of the fragments, see Seishi Karashima and Margarita Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, *Buddhist Manuscripts from Central Asia—The St. Petersburg Sanskrit Fragments (StPSF)*, Vol. I.

¹¹ Regarding the textual analysis of the manuscript: “This *Avadāna* Anthology from Merv, belonging to the Sarvāstivādin tradition, contains many Prakrit (i.e. colloquial) elements and forms in contrast to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, *Avadānaśataka* and *Divyāvadāna* of the same school, all of which show more Sanskritised features. Therefore, this text is very important for the research on the process of Sanskritisation of this school's literature.” Karashima and Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, *Buddhist Manuscripts*, 148.

¹² The correlations can be found in Karashima and Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, *Buddhist Manuscripts*, 197n.72.

¹³ This tale, and the entire *Karmaśataka* have been translated through the efforts of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha. See: <https://read.84000.co/translation/UT22084-073-001.html#UT22084-073-001-1296>. The

Avadānaśataka, as Tale No. 94, entitled *Lekuñcika*.¹⁴ Finally, the third text, which also is entitled *Lekuñcika*, can be found in the *Ratnāvadānamālā*, Tale No. 21. As noted by Karashima and Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, these three texts have similar accounts on karmic retribution due to horrid actions (in the case of *Losaka-jātaka*, committed against his own mother), and lack of generosity.

As for *Losaka-jātaka*, it is clearly mentioned that Losaka and Mittavindaka are the same, so we can trace the tale to another Jātaka, the *Mittavinda-jātaka*.¹⁵ We can trace it as well to the *Avadānaśataka* No. 36, Maitrakanyaka—which is the Sanskrit version of the Pali name Mittavindaka. At first glance, it might seem that they are different stories and have no correlation whatsoever, but it is important to consider that these tales could have been orally transmitted and adapted into script according to different schools and systems, thereby producing variations, yet having somewhat similar results. Some details on name, family, and physical characteristics may differ, but the notion of karmic retribution because of evil deeds, as well as lack of generosity, ill will, and greed, is consistently similar in all the tales that have been analyzed.

Understanding the *Losaka-jātaka*

Even though I have noted the similarities between the *Losaka-jātaka* and other narratives present in other Buddhist scriptures, there are important features to analyze in this specific Jātaka. Since there is a fair number of translations available to English readers, the discussion will be limited to some characteristics of the tale, specially what is known as the present life of Losaka-tiṣya (or in Pali Losaka-tissa), from a Mahāyāna Buddhist perspective.¹⁶

Usually, the Buddhist tales in the Jātaka—or tales which, even though not being from the Jātaka category, fit as Jātakas—provide a practical approach to explaining karma and its fruition to Buddhist practitioners and how the Buddha can analyze previous lives, linking them to the results experienced in this lifetime. In the case of *Losaka-jātaka* it is notable that it begins with a child being born in a fisherman’s family, in a fisherman’s village with a small population of one thousand people. This village has no name in the tale, but it is in the kingdom of Kośala. Misfortune has befallen the village from the day of Losaka’s conception: seven fires have scorched the village, and seven times King Kośala has taken vengeance on the village, all of which occurred before his birth. The villagers were sure that all this misfortune was because of someone being a “breeder of misfortune” or someone who started suffering the results of ripe karma. They started dividing themselves among groups until they traced Losaka’s family. Those

Tibetan folios can be read in the Buddhist Digital Archives, by the title དགེ་སློང་སྐུར་ལྷུང་གི་གཏམ་རྒྱུད་ (*dge slong sgur chung gi gtam rgyud*) or “Tale of the Small Monk (*bhikṣu*) with a Bent (body),” in their website:

https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW3888_4BEDC3.

¹⁴ The text is preserved in Sanskrit and can be consulted on University of Cambridge’s digital library website:

<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01611/1>.

¹⁵ There are three *Mittavinda-jātakas*. They are numbered 82, 104, 369 and 439 in the Theravāda canon. The Chinese canon list their names as 82: 知友本生譚 (*zhī yǒu běn shēng tán*); 104: 知友比丘本生譚 (*zhī yǒu bī qiū tán*); 369: 知友本生譚 (*zhī yǒu běn shēng tán*) and 439- 四門本生譚 (*sì mén běn shēng tán*).

¹⁶ There are many different possible interpretations since Mahāyāna Buddhism(s) have many traditions and schools. In this case, it is an analysis based on the systematical approach of Tibetan Geluk Buddhism linked with the *mahāpāṇḍitas* in Indian Buddhism from a Brazilian perspective – the Brazilian School of Buddhist Studies.

unassociated with Losaka had their lives improve, but the ones associated with Losaka were experiencing famine and misfortune.¹⁷

Losaka's mother had finally given birth to the small child, and she took care of him until he was able to run and walk around. When that time came, she gave him a potsherd and left him.¹⁸ The nameless child, the future Losaka, was abandoned, frail, unkempt, and unloved. It is very important to note that this tale is offering a critique of the notion of karma as understood in the Vedic period (Brahmanism).¹⁹ For a mother to abandon her son and for a village to expel unwanted people—outcasts—can only occur because of the notion of karma as an immovable destiny, something that is unchangeable.

These outcasts are not seen as human and therefor are unworthy of empathy. So, the Vedic system, inspired specially by the *Manusmṛti*, would justify everything using karma, even leaving infants unattended because of their “inevitable fate.”²⁰ For Olivelle, these outcasts are referred to as *cāṇḍālas* or *śvapacas*, living outside villages and having only broken pots to eat in.²¹ Karma played—and still plays—an important role in determining exclusion in the Indian society. There is another important aspect to this tale regarding the outcasts, because the exclusion of these people is justified by their wrong deeds, so that they are despised by “good” people. Moreover, if people are born with deformities, physical and/or mental, it is because of karma, leading again to exclusion.²²

¹⁷ The term used in the Chinese version of the tale to refer to misfortune is 不幸 (*bùxìng*).

¹⁸ The Chinese passage of this tale refers to the potsherd as a ceramic or earthen bowl, 鉢 (*bō*), the same word used for the alms bowls that monks and nuns use. The Chinese version is stronger because the word 逐出 (*zhúchū*), which means “to expel,” is used [the person being expelled was a child, her son as the expression reads 子逐出 (*zǐzhúchū*)]. So he is not left, he was expelled by his own mother. Furthermore, in the Pali text, the term *duggatā* is used, meaning a miserable person or poor person. When we look at the word *kaṇṇa* (Skt. *kaṇṇa*) that also appears in this tale, it is related to the word *duggatā*. Both words serve as explanation to define a low-caste or outcast, a *cāṇḍāla*. The term is also related to other Pali term, *dalidda*. See Rhys Davids, Thomas William. Stede, William. *Pali Text Society Pali-English Dictionary*. Electronic Version, 1999, 186 and 722. Ambedkar states in his *Annihilation of Caste* that “etymologically, the origins of the term Dalit can be traced to the Buddha's usage of the Pali *dalidda* [...]” (97).

¹⁹ Or, at least it is a critique made by Buddhists against the Brahmanical system and their approach on how harmony is to be sustained, since there is a rigid idea of how karma works, being understood as an immovable destiny. Even though there is much discussion on when Hinduism did begin, the author follows Harvey, Hirakawa and others, which state that Hinduism evolved later using ancient texts from the Vedic period (Brahmanism).

²⁰ This relation between this specific text and the legal system in ancient India can be understood while reading the available translations of the text, especially Olivelle's work, mentioned in the bibliography.

²¹ The term, *cāṇḍālas*, is translated as outcast in the Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, and can be translated as pariah according to the Shabda-Sagara Sanskrit Dictionary. The term implies that a person called that way is the lowest and most despised, even in the sense of mixing *varṇas* or *jāti* producing mixed offspring. See: Monier-Williams, Monier. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005. The second term, *śvapacas*, can be understood as the same as *cāṇḍāla*. But it can also bring the connotation of “dog-feeder” or someone who is like a dog, degraded. See Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary and Shabda-Sagara Electronic Sanskrit Dictionary. The assertion that they live outside villages is according to Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Manava-dharmaśāstra*. New York: Oxford, 2005, 210. See chapter 10, verses 51 to 56.

²² According to Olivelle, p. 217, chapter 11, verse 53: “In this way, as a result of the remnants of their past deeds, are born individuals despised by good people: the mentally retarded, the mute, the blind, and the deaf, as well as those who are deformed.”

Returning to the tale, when Losaka reaches the age of seven, he is found by Śāriputra, while going for alms in Śrānvasī (in Pali, Sāvattihī), the capital of the kingdom of Kośala. Since the village where Losaka is from is unnamed, it is unsure how far he must have walked from where his former home was until he came to find Śāriputra in the capital.

Śāriputra then takes Losaka into the Saṃgha (Pali: *Saṅgha*), teaching him, providing care and everything necessary for his development. So, it can be perceived that in this tale Śāriputra's role is the one of a bodhisattva: someone who takes the path with the solid desire to become a Buddha, and who also enables others in this path or in the path of an arhat.

Even when becoming a monk and training tirelessly, Losaka still received less alms and ate less, this being a result of his previous deeds as the tale tells.²³ But he was protected, cared for, and had access to learning and practicing the Dharma. This is of utmost importance, and I will explore this later. However, it is noteworthy to mention that this Buddhist notion of karma is different from the Vedic system.²⁴ It is this remodeling of the concept that enabled social change at the time of the Buddha Śākyamuni (and even later).²⁵

Because of all the efforts of the Saṃgha, especially from the Buddha himself, as well as constant support from Śāriputra, Losaka was able to complete his studies, practice and live in a community, being no less human than anyone there. Considering the tale, Losaka could even live long enough to reach old age, and still with all the support to persist in his training. Because of constant practices of *dāna* (“generosity”) from everyone in the saṃgha, as well as Losaka's own personal practices of *kṣānti* (“patience”), *dāna*, *vīrya* (“effort”), and other *pāramitās* (“perfections,” or noble character traits associated with enlightened beings), he benefits from Śāriputra's actions up until the last moments of his life.²⁶ Then, after all these ordeals, in his last breath, he achieved the fruit of Arhathood.

An arhat is someone free from the state of afflictions, who will not be reborn again, entering *nirvāna-dhātu* after death.²⁷ The tale explains in the beginning that this would be Losaka's final life in this realm of uncontrolled rebirths, or *saṃsāra*.

²³ Regarding the lack of generosity and its ties to the fact that Losaka eats less, receives less alms, there is an interesting analysis of the notion of poverty in the Pali Canon, researched by Mavis Lillian Fenn. See: Fenn, Mavis Lillian. *The Concept of Poverty in the Pali Canon*. Religious Studies Department, McMaster University, Canada, 1994. Open Access Dissertations and Theses: <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/handle/11375/13724>.

²⁴ The word karma is derived from *karman*, meaning “action” in Sanskrit. See Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary.

²⁵ Before attaining Buddhahood, Sarvārthasiddha had been part of the *śramaṇa* movement, cutting all ties with social obligations and structures as sustained by the Vedic system of rule. Inspired by this, he developed the Buddhist communities, or Saṃghas (Saṅgha in Pali). Regarding this notion of karma, there is plenty of work available for readers. See: Palazzo Tsai, Patricia Guernelli. *Responsabilidade Universal: Dialogando Dalai Lama e Direitos Humanos*. Valinhos: BUDA, 2022.

²⁶ Even though the *Losaka-jātaka* as used here comes from a Theravadin perspective, there are connections to, or even a dialogue with Mahāyāna traditions, and because of this, the text will be analyzed from a Mahāyāna perspective, because for both traditions it is important for practitioners to develop the *pāramitās* (or *pāramī*, in Pali).

²⁷ Arhathood and Buddhahood are not synonyms, and there are many discussions in the Buddhist Studies field regarding why there was a great split between schools, one of the motives being the idea that becoming an *Arhat* is not the final goal, and not the same as a *Buddha*. Since this essay does not intend to dwell in this matter, further information on this topic can be found in Lamotte, Étienne. *History of Indian Buddhism*. Louvain: Université

Sentient Beings and Human Dignity in the Saṃgha: Reading Between the Lines

Discussing human dignity in Buddhism(s) can be much of a shock because of the preconception that this concept was developed only in Western countries. Additionally, there is the false, Orientalist assumption of the inferiority of Asian philosophy and religions.²⁸ However, Buddhism(s) can speak for their own traditions, without asking for Western blessings.

When the Buddha talked about concepts that already existed in the Vedic period, such as *avidyā*, distortive ignorance, *karma*, and so on, he used and changed their meaning, in order to produce a new understanding.²⁹ In order for this dialogue between worlds to occur, it was necessary to do something the Buddhist traditions already did, using words and concepts and giving new meaning, or relating them, with the intention to communicate something in common, in this case, the notion of human dignity.³⁰ To discuss this topic, it is necessary to think beyond labels, because according to many Buddhist doctrines, dignity would not refer only to human beings, but rather emphasize the notion of sentient beings. So, humans are as valuable as other forms of sentient life. Humans are only a part of the cosmos in an interdependent manner, and in no way superior to other forms of life.³¹

A sentient being is a being endowed with five aggregates (*pañcaskandha*), as presented by the early Buddhist schools, and that is still studied nowadays.³² Sentience is characterized by the existence and function of the five aggregates.³³ These are *rūpa*, *saṃskāra*, *saṃjñā*, *vedanā*, and *vijñāna*.³⁴ Any being that is endowed with these five aggregates is a sentient being. This has great importance, since any sentient being has the potential to become a buddha, or an arhat, and this is something already present in the Buddha's time as well, being later on further developed in *tathāgatagarbha* theory/theories.³⁵ This notion leads to recognizing the importance of ethics in the

Catholique de Louvain, 1988. See also Nattier, Janice; Prebish, Charles. *Mahāsāṃghika Origins: The Beginnings of Buddhist Sectarianism*. History of Religions 16, 3 (February 1977).

²⁸ Besides Hegel's argument in his *History of Philosophy* that Asian countries are inferior to Europe, even in intellectual development, there still are many preconceptions regarding Buddhism and Buddhist theories, being one of them the impossibility of relating Human Rights to Buddhist doctrines. For the discussion on Human Rights and Buddhism see: Keown, Prebish and Husted, *Buddhism and Human Rights*, Surrey: Curzon, 1998. These arguments can be analyzed as contemporary reflections based on historical preconceptions.

²⁹ This can be found in many works, such as Gombrich, Richard. *How Buddhism Began*. Oxon: Routledge, 2006. The Buddha took concepts and imbued them with new meanings and metaphors.

³⁰ The methodology used to produce this dialogue between concepts and worlds is based on the Buddha's examples, as well as the methods of comparative philosophy from Andrew Tuck's *isogesis*. Also, there is an important contribution of the Latin America Liberation Theologies, from authors Jung Mo Sung and Mario I. Aguilar.

³¹ In general, Buddhist traditions highlight that a human rebirth is superior to other rebirths, being a more precious opportunity in terms of achieving liberation, *nirvāṇa*.

³² A very important Buddhist work regarding *Abhidharma* is Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.

³³ As explained by Tsai, in the Portuguese translation of the Chinese *Mahāvādānasūtra*, 大本經. See: Tsai, Plínio. *Sermão do Grande Fundamento*. Valinhos: BUDA, 2019.

³⁴ The terms can be translated as form or matter (*rūpa*), concomitant thoughts (*saṃskāra*), ideation (*saṃjñā*), sensation (*vedanā*) and consciousness (dual consciousness, *vijñāna*).

³⁵ The *tathāgatagarbha* theories are not accepted in all Buddhist schools and systems, but this notion of equanimity between all sentient beings can be found present in all of them. The notions of sentience and equanimity have adapted in different places and cultures to provide different theories to enable comprehending the importance of interdependence.

life of a Buddhist monk, nun, laymen and laywomen, since all actions matter, because the goal is to reach a mental and existential state free from afflictions.

In order to understand how sentient beings are connected to each other, we have also to understand interdependence. Regarding the notion of interdependence flux, there are two instances: one regarding the sentient being, the five aggregates flux (simple interdependence) and another that regards the being's surroundings, the world flux (complex interdependence).³⁶

Considering these interconnected relations between the two notions, it is necessary to think in terms of connecting early Buddhist schools theory to Mahāyāna Buddhist development on ethics. In *Lamrim Chenmo*, Je Tsongkhapa explains the shared paths between systems. This is important, because the notion of five aggregates, as exposed by the early Buddhist schools, are the basis to understand the further development made by Mahāyāna schools.³⁷

Since the beginning of Buddhism, the idea that there is no superiority of a certain class, or even because of wealth, fame, etc., was rooted in the Buddha Śākyamuni's discourses. These distinctions lead to extremes. Extremes lead to more suffering—and then, to the continuity of uncontrolled rebirths, *saṃsāra*.³⁸ The notion of karma justifying certain social backgrounds of *Varṇas* and ruling classes suited perfectly the *brāhmaṇas* and even *kṣatriyas* during the Vedic period.³⁹ This was something that the *śramaṇa* movement challenged, and Sarvārthasiddha was a part of that movement.

After achieving the final goal of *samyaksambuddha*, or a complete awakened one, the Buddha along with his movement still maintained that position—challenging the Vedic system and the notion of karma as it was defended at that time, grounded in the equanimity (*upekṣā*) of all sentient beings. In the same way, it is possible to reflect on human dignity in the Western world. It is something common to all humanity, being fruit of historical turmoil that led to the necessity of creating mechanisms to protect people from arbitrary decisions and from the state itself. What we understand as human dignity nowadays is directly linked to the development of ethics from Pico della Mirandola, Immanuel Kant, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and others.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, many of the authors discussing this topic have a Eurocentric approach in which Europe was and still has to be the center of the world.

³⁶ As presented by Plínio Tsai in his *Sermão do Grande Fundamento*, 220. This concept of interdependence, *pratītyasamutpāda*, is according to Buddhist principles, and it should not be confused with the neoliberal usage of the word interdependence, especially not Robert Keohane's and Joseph Nye's.

³⁷ This notion of shared paths in Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo* can be seen in Vol. I. See: Tsongkhapa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (Ed. Joshua Cutler). Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2000.

³⁸ These notions can be found as early as the *Dharmacakrapravartana-sūtra*. And they can also be read in the *Udānavarga*.

³⁹ For the use of *varṇa*, see: Hirakawa, Akira. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii, 1990. Also, Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*. New York: Cambridge, 2013. The word *varṇa* can also be translated as color, so it is possible to understand this word not only indicating that the separation of people was made according to classes, but also by a distinction based on color. For the argument regarding *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas*, see Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 11-14. Also, Hans Schumann, *the Historical Buddha*, 33.

⁴⁰ Pico della Mirandola also tried to establish an interfaith dialogue in his time (1463-1494), and created a beautiful text regarding human dignity. See his *Oratio de hominis dignitate*. The text was made available to public through the efforts of Università degli Studi di Bologna and Brown University:

https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/pico/text/ov.html. Furthermore, as pointed by Remy Debes, in *Dignity: A History*, Kant was inspired by Rousseau's philosophy to deepen the understanding on dignity.

Many great minds try to reflect on human dignity, and in our times, this concept is connected to studies on human rights and their defense.⁴¹ Because of the specific scope of dignity, discussion of it here is based on Christoph Menke's studies of Hannah Arendt, in which he quotes her famous notion of "the right to have rights" and develops an interesting analysis of human dignity.⁴² Arendt is an important figure in the study of human rights, but she also has fierce criticism of what these rights would be. For her, the most basic characteristic of human existence is its social aspect, related to the desire to be seen, heard, and embraced in a community. What does Hannah Arendt have to do with Buddhist doctrines and discussions present in the *Losaka-jātaka*? Why should we talk about Buddhism and Western thought together? The intention of this paper is to create a space of dialogue between worlds, bringing forth contributions from Buddhist traditions and Western thought.

In analyzing Arendt, Peg Birmingham states: "Only a principle of humanity is able to provide the normative source for an imperative of common responsibility... [F]or Arendt, humanity itself must now assume the role formerly ascribed to nature, history, or god: 'The right to have rights, the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself.'"⁴³

The act of humans being responsible for guaranteeing dignity to all seems to be precisely the case of what the Buddha intended to do, and with time further elaborated by Mahāyāna Buddhist schools. Arendt, in her time, is thinking of the aftermath of the horrendous events of WWII, in which humans were responsible for the destruction of uncountable lives, so a criterion of human dignity on paper, justified by nature or even God, was not enough. The impact these events had on Arendt are accurately presented by Birmingham: "The gates of Heaven are shut, the hands of God are closed. The rationality of nature, the self-evidence of reason, and the progress of history have given way to the death camps and holes of oblivion, leaving us to face nothing but ourselves. Humanity itself must guarantee the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity."⁴⁴

In a way, this reality of exclusion and eradication is also central to analyzing Losaka's tale. Losaka was an outcast, someone considered wretched and cursed and expelled by his society (the negation of social and humane ties), and thus he was left to die. In this narrative, he encounters Śāriputra, is rescued and cared for, is included in the Buddhist community, and flourishes there, knitting once more social ties.

Arendt discusses how human dignity in its origins is linked directly to the sense of belonging in a community, of inclusion, of living together with others.⁴⁵ Thinking of human

⁴¹ For further discussion on dignity, see: Mayorga, Ivón Cepeda. *La dignidad como un elemento clave en la reflexión sobre el concepto de paz*. In: *Hacia un amable vivir* (Ed. Dora Elvira García). Mexico: Porrúa, 2018.

⁴² See Menke, Christoph. *Dignity as the right to have rights: human dignity in Hannah Arendt*. In: *Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 338.

⁴³ See Peg Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 8.

⁴⁴ See Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights*, 6.

⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt develops this in her *The Rights of Man: What are They?*. See: Arendt, Hannah. *The Rights of Man: What are They*. *Modern Review* 3, (I), 1949, 24-37.)

dignity in these terms—as the right to belong, to be part of a community, to be seen or heard, and also to participate—can clarify that exclusion because of karma is denying those rights to people, and that placing a label of outcast on someone is not absolute or divine imposition, but rather human creation—as a result of *avidyā* (ignorance).⁴⁶

We can use the *Losaka-jātaka* as an example. Losaka had been expelled based on karma, being left to wither in early childhood, excluded, separated from society, and later being welcomed to the Saṅgha because of Śāriputra’s compassionate intervention.⁴⁷ This compassionate intervention is what highlights the recognition of Losaka’s dignity. Thus, it also points to an interesting relation between inclusion (which is deeply related to the notion of dignity) and compassion. Human dignity is the core principle of human rights, and by associating dignity, social inclusion, and compassion together, these concepts show that the defense of Human Rights implies directly in the defense of these elements, interdependent with not only human life, but with all sentient life as well.

Combining the notion of human dignity as the right to belong in a community, not being isolated and excluded, as worked by Arendt (and Menke), and what the Jātaka tale provides, there are enough elements to consider a link between this notion of human dignity, belonging and action based on compassion (as well as universal responsibility to Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially in the Tibetan Geluk Tradition).⁴⁸

From Outcast to Arhat

The final remarks can begin with the following question: Can we understand this specific Jātaka as simply a narrative or can it be something more? It is considered that the Jātaka tales are fictional narratives that were supposed to induce its readers to be inspired by it and seek personal changes, but they could also inspire social change. Thus, analyzing the *Losaka-jātaka* and its relations to other Jātaka tales can bring forth more elements for consideration.

Whether Losaka actually existed will probably remain an unanswered question, depending on archeological research, data, and other elements to enable progress in this matter. Analyzing and reflecting on issues that appear recurrently in the specific tale (as well as its variations), it is safe to

⁴⁶ Regarding Christian traditions, it is important to note that the idea of justice as retribution is contrary to Jesus’ notion of Love and Grace, as developed by Portilla (2022, 99): “When his disciples were discussing whether a man could be born blind because of sin (that of the man or of his parents), thinking in terms of Justice and cause-and-effect, Jesus challenged their views by introducing Love and Grace in Johan 9:3: Neither this man nor his parents sinned...but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him” (Isaac Portilla, *What Christ Said: Revisiting the Countercultural Sayings of Christ Jesus* [Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2022], 99). Thus, we can see possibilities of dialogue between the notion of *karma* according to the Buddha and the notion of Justice according to Jesus, and also the human intervention that unites *karma* and Justice as retribution.

⁴⁷ Śāriputra’s logic is somewhat diverse than the Brahmanical sense of *karma*. It is possible to analyze it as based on *bodhicitta*, a result from the development of *mahākaruṇā*, *mahāmaṭṭri* and the sense of universal responsibility – སྐྱེ་སེམས་ (*spyi sems*). Regarding universal responsibility, it is analyzed in the author’s Master thesis, as well as in Aguilar’s recent work *The 14th Dalai Lama: Peacekeeping and Universal Responsibility*. London: Routledge, 2021.

⁴⁸ The objective of this essay is to present an initial discussion to these points that are of utmost importance when we think about Buddhist ethics, society, and its many complex issues. It is the author’s intention that further development and discussion of these elements occur.

say that the tale reflects the many Losakas that existed in India at that time, and many others that may still exist in our time today—not only in India, but in other societies and times as well. There is a growing necessity to ponder the complex issues of karma and retribution in our times because these notions have a significant influence on how the concept of justice is articulated, as well as its impacts in class, segregation, exclusion, consumerism, environmental destruction, and others.⁴⁹ Additionally, this impacts how we can draw similarities between the analysis of textual evidence from Buddhist traditions regarding social change with the many varieties of liberation theologies, consequently opening a pathway to dialogue.⁵⁰

This dialogue is of utmost importance considering the many issues humankind has been facing in the last decades, especially in a post-COVID-19 world. Even though the concept of human dignity is relatively recent as we articulate it in the West—and still involves many discussions—it is possible to find glimpses or traces of dignity in these narratives and how they can be meaningful today, thereby offering alternatives to the way we think and to the way we shape reality as we live it.

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⁴⁹ These topics are discussed in many areas, but with great interest and debates in liberation theologies. See: Jung Mo Sung, *The Subject, Capitalism and Religion: Horizons of Hope in Complex Societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). And also: Mario I. Aguilar. *After Pestilence: An Interreligious Theology of the Poor* (London: SCM Press, 2021).

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