

Buddhist Attitude to Poem

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Introduction

Background of the Study

Pali literature is renowned for its profound spiritual and philosophical teachings. The Pali language belongs to the middle Indo-Aryan era of the Indo-European language family. The Pali Poem encompasses all the verses and prose found in Pali literature. The Pali Canon distinctly features "Gāthā" and "Udāna" as poetic compositions. According to the Pali Canon, the Lord Buddha was indeed the first poet in Pali Literature. The elder monks preceding the conclusion of the third Dhamma council were also acclaimed for their poetic prowess, evident in works such as Thēragāthā (experiences of elder monks) and Thērigāthā (experiences of elder nuns). Poets like Sappaka Thēragāthā, Selissariya Thēragāthā, Bhūta Thēragāthā, Khēma Thērigāthā, Ambapāli Thērigāthā, and ChāpaThērigāthā are a testament to their skill. While some scholars suggest these Buddhist canonical verses were composed during the third Dhamma council by elder monks, it is widely recognized that the Lord Buddha, Arahants, and elder monks were indeed highly skilled in poetic composition. Numerous esteemed monks and philosophers followed suit. The "Subodhalankara" and "Vuttodaya" stand as the foundational poetic criticism works of Pali literature, while the Pali Canon contains a plethora of verses.

The Objective of the Research

This research aims to interpret the Buddhist perspective on poetry using canonical sources from Lord Buddha and his disciples.

Research Problem

This research addresses the following research questions, "What is the Buddhist attitude toward poem? And how is the Lord Buddha's appreciation of it?"

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Limitations and Significance of the Research

The research objective is to explore the Buddhist attitude towards poetry and Lord Buddha's appreciation of it. This research effectively identifies gaps in the existing literature and clearly outlines the areas where this study aims to make a valuable contribution. The examples powerfully illustrate how the Lord Buddha and the monks utilized these features to vividly convey their insights, emotions, and teachings. This research unequivocally aims to discuss the Buddhist attitude to the poem based on the Pali Canon. Given the scarcity of resources about Pali's poetic criticism, this study will boldly be composed based on primary resources following Buddha's Doctrine and the explanations of scholars.

Literature Review and Gaps

The Pali literature holds a significant position within the Buddhist tradition due to its profound spiritual and philosophical content. This body of work includes poetic compositions such as verses (Gāthā) and solemn utterances (Udāna). The main objective of this literature review is to thoroughly analyze the Buddhist attitude toward poetry, with a specific focus on Lord Buddha's appreciation and use of it, based on canonical sources. In the Sakkapañha Sutta, the Pañcasikha who was a great musician in God's world sang poems with the qualities of Buddha, Dhamma, Arahants, and Lusts as well as Lord Buddha appreciated it (The Dīgha Nikāya Vol. II, 1995; 265).

Canonical Poetic Expressions in Pali Literature

According to Sakalikasutta, One day, the Maraya came to the Buddha and asked "Buddha, were you composing poetry." "Mandiyā nu sesi udāhu kāveyyamatto" (The Saṃyutta- Nikāya Vol. I, 2006; 110). The Kavi Sutta mentions an encounter where a Goddess came to the Buddha and asked about verses. The Buddha answered that "Chandas" refers to prosody, "Vyanjana" means letters, "Sannishraya" means nouns, and "Ashraya" refers to the poet (The Saṃyutta Nikāya, 2006; 38). Once upon a time, Venerable Vangisa rose from his seat, placed his robe over one shoulder, saluted the Blessed One with cupped hands, and addressed him with a verse. (Sutta-Nipāta, 2001; 42) According to the Mahā Maṅgala Sutta, one of God came to the Buddha and asked some matters from a verse. "Gāthāya ajjhabhāsī" (Sutta-Nipāta, 2001; 32).

Some monks who were in Buddha Sasana tried to chant Buddhist doctrine such as some suttas but Buddha rejected that and promulgated a Vinaya rule (Disciplinary promulgation) for that. As follows, "Na Bhikkhavē āyatikēna gītassarēna dhammō gāyī tabbō yō gāyeyya āpatti dukkaṭassāti" (The Vinaya Piṭakaṃ Vol. II, 1995). According to Alagaddūpama Sutta in Majjhima Nikāya

and Vērañjaka section of Pārājikapāli, there is some part called “Geyya” in Buddha’s teachings. “geyyam” (The Majjhima-Nikāya Vol. I, 2002; 134). In the Ruṇṇa Sutta, Lord Buddha explained the concept of song and dance as follows: “In Arya Vinaya, the song is a cry, and dance is an obsession” (The Aṅguttara-Nikāya Part I, 1999; 261).

Methodology

This research will be composed under the content analyzing method using primary sources. The main method is to gather information through academic research using libraries.

Results and Discussion

There seems to be some confusion because, at one point, Lord Buddha prohibited poetic compositions, chanting, and enjoyment, while at another time, he was appreciated for it. The Buddha imposed the rule to prevent people from becoming addicted to lust, while the Arhants may have appreciated it because they had no attachment to sensual pleasures.

Conclusion

Based on the above historical and scholarly perspectives, it can be believed that during the time of the Buddha, a poetic form of the Pali language was likely used. The Buddha may have learned this language during his early life and later used it to preach the Doctrine after his Enlightenment. If this was not the case, then it is possible that the Elder Monks (Arahants), who were part of the Dhamma Councils, converted the Buddhist Doctrine into verse. It is also possible that the Elder Monks used some poetic Pali language in their teachings and daily life.

Keywords: Buddhist Attitude, Buddhist Literature, Pali Canon, Poetic Criticism, Poetic Composition in Buddhism

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