

Self-Sacrifice of the Kings in the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* and Thai Buddhist Narratives¹

Arthid Sheravanichkul²

Abstract

This paper aims to study narratives from the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* and Thai Buddhist narratives from the *Paññāsa Jātaka* and the *Anāgatavaṃsa* in which the main characters are the kings who sacrifice their lives. In the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā*, regarded as a eulogy of King Vikramāditya, one of the greatest heroes of India, he is characterized as a highly generous king who gives everything for the sake of others. In ten out of thirty-two stories, the king sacrifices his life in order to satisfy the deities, to help others, and to save others' lives. In Thai Buddhist narratives: the *Paññāsa Jātaka* and the *Anāgatavaṃsa*, the self-sacrifice of kings is also found. However, it is not intended to prove his righteousness as a king *per se*, but to demonstrate the highest level of the perfection of generosity. In the *Paññāsa Jātaka*, there are four stories in which the king bodhisattva sacrifices his body and life with devotion and compassion to Sakka who comes in disguise to

¹ This study is a part of my Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Dāna and Dānapāramī : Significance in the Creation of Thai Buddhist Literature."

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² Lecturer, Department of Thai, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

test him by begging for parts of body, or by asking for his body as an offering to a sermon. Also, in the *Anāgatavaṃsa*, there are two stories in which the king bodhisattvas devoutly cut off their heads as offerings to the sermons of the Buddhas.

From the study, the self-sacrifice of the kings in the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* and Thai Buddhist narratives seem to be approximately similar; the kings are tested and then sacrifice their lives to the deities, or they liberally sacrifice themselves for the sake of others. But actually, the concept and purpose of such sacrifice are distinctly different. In the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā*, the liberality of King Vikramāditya is woven with devotion, honesty and courage. These inspiring virtues prove him to be an ideal king in the “Hindu” context. In the Buddhist context, meanwhile, the self-sacrifice of a king is merged with the concept of *Dānapāramī* – the perfection of generosity. Through the sacrifice, the bodhisattvas renounce kingship and completely become a ‘qualified’ bodhisattva who fulfils the *Dānapāramī*. Buddhahood is the otherworldly goal for him not the worldly pleasures or the ephemeral status of a king.

Introduction

Self-sacrifice is one of the bodhisattva practices. In order to fulfil the perfection of generosity, apart from giving the ‘external’ gift of his material possessions, his children and wife, the bodhisattva also has to sacrifice himself or give the ‘internal’ gift of his limbs, his body, and his life.

In the system of thirty perfections, the perfection of generosity is classified into three levels: *Dāna-pāramī* – giving of material possessions, children and wife; *Dāna-upapāramī* – giving of limbs; and *Dāna-paramatthapāramī* – giving of body.

The bodhisattva’s self-sacrifice is found in many Indian Buddhist *jātakas* and *avadānas*. In the Pāli *Jātaka-atthakathā* the bodhisattva’s

self-sacrifice is found in seven jātakas, namely *Sivi Jātaka*, *Sasa Jātaka*, *Chaddanta Jātaka*, *Sīlavanāga Jātaka*, *Nigrodhamiga Jātaka*, *Cullanandiya Jātaka*, and *Jayadissa Jātaka*.

In the Pāli *Cariyāpiṭaka*, in which the concept of pāramīs or ten perfections is clearly associated with the stories, the self-sacrifice exemplifies the perfection of generosity in two stories, namely *Sīvirāja Cariyā* and *Sasa Cariyā*.

In Sanskrit avadānas, such as the *Avadānakalpalatā*, the *Avadānaśataka*, and the *Divyāvadāna*, the bodhisattva's self-sacrifice is even more flourished as found in, for example, *Mañicūḍāvadāna*, *Śrīsenāvadāna*, *Candraprabhāvadāna*, *Kacchapāvadāna*, the story of King Śibi, and the story of the hare bodhisattva, and so on. Reiko Ohnuma³ studied these narratives in details as her Ph.D. dissertation.

In the *Paññāsa Jātaka*, the perfection of generosity is also demonstrated through the bodhisattva's self-sacrifice. In fourteen stories out of sixty-one jātakas in the Thai National Library collection, he gives parts of his body or his whole body to others. The sacrifice highlights the great compassion, strong intention and aspiration to attain Buddhahood, gratitude to his parents, and true devotion to the Triple Gems. Also, it inspires people to give and promotes faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha.⁴

The bodhisattva who sacrifices his life in the *Paññāsa Jātaka* might be a human being—he could be a king, a prince, or a merchant—or he might be an animal, such as a mouse or a turtle. This study focuses only on the king bodhisattva and compares this character to King Vikramāditya in the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā*.

Self-sacrifice of the king bodhisattva is considered in this paper because in the ocean of Indian narratives, no matter whether they are

³ Reiko Ohnuma, *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature* (New York; Chichester; West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁴ See Arthid Sheravanichkul, "Self-Sacrifice of the Bodhisattva in the Paññāsa Jātaka." *Religion Compass* 2, 5 (August 2008): 769-787.

labelled as 'Hindu', 'Buddhist', or 'Jain', there are many stories in which the main character is a very generous king who can give everything, even his limbs or his life to others. A substantial example for this is the story of King Śibi who gives away his flesh to ransom a dove, which is regarded as a jātaka or avadāna found in the Buddhist texts of *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā* and the *Avadānakalpalatā*, and is depicted in numerous Buddhist cave paintings, such as at Ajanta.⁵ This story is also told in the *Mahābhārata*, book III, chapter 197,⁶ and the idea of such sacrifice appears in Jaina narratives, such as when Śantināthacarita Megharatha is depicted as ready to leave from his own flesh to save the life of a bird from a hunter.⁷

Therefore, it might be interesting to determine how this motif exists and is used in the Buddhist context and Hindu context. Also, this comparison may provide a wider perspective on what is 'the bodhisattva's self-sacrifice' in Buddhist narratives.⁸

Self-Sacrifice of the King Bodhisattva in Thai Buddhist Narratives

From the corpus of gift-of-the-body jātakas in Indian Buddhist literature, both in Pāli and Sanskrit, collected by Ohnuma (2007: 273-283) there are a number of stories in which the bodhisattva is a king who sacrifices his life.⁹

⁵ Meena V. Talim, "Ajanta Paintings and the Jātaka Tales," *Indica* 25, 2 (September 1988): 110-111.

⁶ M. Longworth Dames; T.A. Joyce, "Note on a Gandhāra Relief Representing the Story of King Śivi," *Man* (13: 1913): 17.

⁷ T. Gupta, "The Heroic Sentiment," ed. Nagendra Singh Kr., *Encyclopaedia of Jainism* (Delhi: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2001) 2518.

⁸ See Justin Meiland (2003) in which *Vessantara Jātaka*, treated as an epic, is compared with the *Rāmāyaṇa* in order to examine how the jātakas actually interact with the related narrative traditions.

⁹ These stories are only examples. Chattopadhyay (1994 : 232) also mentions another story of King Śibi from the *Avadānaśataka* in which he inflicts wounds on his body by himself and offers his blood to the mosquitoes and insects; and from his study (Chattopadhyay 176-179, 232) in the *Avadānakalpalatā* by Kṣemendra there are three more avadānas which do not appear in Ohnuma's corpus.

<i>The Bodhisattva</i>	<i>Sacrifice</i>	<i>Texts</i>
A. King Śibi	gives his eyes to a brāhmin	<i>Pāli Jātaka</i> <i>Cariyāpiṭaka</i> <i>Jātakamālā</i> <i>Mahajjātakamālā</i> <i>Avadānaśataka</i>
B. King Śibi	gives his flesh to ransom a dove	<i>Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā</i> <i>Avadānakalpalatā</i>
C. King Candraprabhā	gives his head to a brāhmin	<i>Dīvyāvadāna</i> Sutra of the wise and the fool
D. King Maitrībala	gives his flesh and blood to five yakṣas	<i>Jātakamālā</i> Sutra of the wise and the fool
E. King Maṇicūḍā	gives his flesh and blood to a Rākṣasa and his crest-jewel to a group of brāhmins	<i>Maṇicūḍāvadāna</i> <i>Lokānandanāṭaka</i>
F. King Sarvaṃdada	offers his head to a brāhmin	<i>Avadānasarasamuccaya</i> <i>Mahajjātakamālā</i> <i>Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā</i>
G. King Padmaka	becomes a fish and gives his flesh and blood to his subjects	<i>Avadānaśataka</i> <i>Avadānakalpalatā</i> Sutra of the wise and the fool

In the Thai Buddhist texts chosen here, there are three kinds of self-sacrifice of the king bodhisattva. Firstly, in the *Paññāsa Jātaka*, there are two stories in which the king gives parts of his body to Sakka in disguise. In *Siricuḍāmaṇi Jātaka*, the king cuts his body in half; gives one half to Sakka in the guise of a brāhmin, and the other half to two ogres. In *Mahāsurasena Jātaka*, the king cuts off his head and gives it to Sakka in the guise of a headless man.

These two stories share the same plotline with *Sivi Jātaka* from the *Jātaka-atthakathā*, in which King Sivi gives his eyes to Sakka in the guise of a blind brāhmin. Also, the gift of head and the body in half in these two stories are paralleled to *Candraprabhāvadānas* and *Śrīsenāvadāna* respectively.

Secondly, the king bodhisattvas in *Dharmasonḍaka Jātaka* and *Surūpa Jātaka* from the *Paññāsa Jātaka* give their bodies as an offering to the sermon of Sakka who comes in the guise of a demon. In these two stories, the bodhisattvas are born in the time where there is no Buddha. However, they aspire to hear the Buddha's teaching. Thus, Sakka comes to the kings to help them fulfil this aspiration and to test their strong intention. He promises to give a verse of teaching as long as they give their bodies as food for him. With the great devotion to the Dhamma, the kings delightedly sacrifice their bodies as asked. The stories resemble *Śibi-Subhāṣitāvadāna* in the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* by Kṣemendra.¹⁰

Thirdly, in the *Anāgatavaṃsa*, there are two king bodhisattvas who devoutly sacrifice their lives to the Buddha and Dhamma. The emperor Saṅkhacakra cuts off his head as an offering to the sermon of Sirimata Buddha, and the emperor Mahāpanāda Paramacakra cuts off his head and offers it to Kakusandha Buddha. After the sacrifice, the bodhisattvas are reborn in the Tusitā heaven.

We may see that when the king bodhisattvas give their bodies to Sakka who comes in the guise of a pitiful brāhmin or a wrathful demon to test or support them in the fulfilment of the pāramīs, the self-sacrifice demonstrates their compassion and strong intention to give without hesitation, without any attachment to the throne, or even life. The gift of body or head as an offering to the Buddha and Dhamma highlights their strong and great devotion. It conveys the idea that the Buddha and Dhamma are so worthy of respect that one should relinquish oneself entirely. Also, the bodhisattvas cultivate the ultimate wisdom by considering the impermanence of their very bodies.

¹⁰ See Jayanti Chattopadhyay, *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā: A Critical Study* (Calcutta: Atisha Memorial Publishing Society, 1994) 232-234. Also, Jaini (2001: 370-371) remarks that *Surūpa* has been traced to the *Dīvyāvadāna* and the *Avadānaśataka*.

Self-Sacrifice of King Vikramāditya in the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā*

The *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* is an Indian narrative relating thirty-two great deeds of King Vikramāditya. The text has many manuscript recensions under many titles: *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* or *Dvātrimśatikā*; *Dvātrimśat Puttalikā Ākhyāna* (Thirty-two Statue Stories); *Vikramāditya Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* (Thirty-two Tales of the Throne of Vikramāditya); and *Vikramāditya* or *Vikrama carita* (Deeds or Adventures of Vikrama).¹¹

The authority of the edition and English translation of this text belongs to Franklin Edgerton in the *Harvard Oriental Series*, first published in 1926. This edition is from five recensions, namely the Southern recension (SR), the Metrical recension (MR), the Brief recension (BR), the Jainistic recension (JR), and the Varāruci recension (VR). SR and MR are found generally in South India. BR and JR are of north India. VR, which is actually secondary to JR, is found in Bengal.¹²

According to Haksar, the main tread of the narrative is the same in all the recensions. JR projects Jaina religious and ethical beliefs, while the other three recensions manifest orthodox Hindu perspectives, such as deities and religious observances.¹³ Edgerton argues that 'JR too was derived from the orthodox archetype of SR, MR and BR', and its didactic and sententious emphasis in particular was enhanced under the growing socio-cultural influence of Jainism.¹⁴

¹¹ A.N.D. Haksar, *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā: Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne of Vikramāditya* (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998) xiii.

¹² Franklin Edgerton, *Vikrama's Adventures or the Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne: a Collection of Stories about King Vikrama, as Told by the Thirty-Two Statuettes that Supported his Throne. Harvard Oriental Series*, Vol. 26 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Harvard University Press, 1926) xxix.

¹³ Haksar xii-xiv.

¹⁴ Edgerton.

The composition of the text might date to the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century. But the legend of Vikramāditya is of course a thousand years older, the title having been used as early as the fourth century. The text is known to have been translated into Persian by order of the emperor Akbar in about 1547. It also exists in Siamese, Newari and Tibetan or Mongolian versions.¹⁵ In Siam, the Persian version was 'translated' into Thai and entitled *Nithan Iran Rājadharmā* (The Tales of Iran's Rājadharmā) or *Nithan Sipsong Liam* (The Tales of the Twelve-Angled Pillar). However, the stories are the virtuous deeds of a great king of Persia, not King Vikrama.¹⁶

The texts of the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* used in this study are the English edition by A.N.D. Haksar (1998) and the Thai translated version by Saksri Yamnadda (1994).

The *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* tells thirty-two great deeds of King Vikramāditya, who is a famous figure in Indian Folklore, and represented as a great and good king whose reign was a golden age of righteousness, peace and prosperity.¹⁷ Edgerton remarks that he is the 'Hindu King Arthur' – a model of real kings to follow.¹⁸

According to H.V. Sreenivasa Murthy, King Vikrama is:

an ideal king who was as wise as he was brave and strong. He did not want kingship, but when the people needed him, became king. Matchless in war and matchless in forgiveness, an excellent ruler, he won the hearts of his people.¹⁹

¹⁵ Haksar xv-xvii. For the Mongolian versions, see Bawden (1960) and (1962). Compared to the Indian versions collected and edited by Edgerton (1926) and Haksar (1998), the Mongolian versions take only the central motif of the throne and Vikramāditya's heroic adventures, other details of the stories are greatly different.

¹⁶ Saksri Yamnadda, *Vikramacarita or Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* (Bangkok: Mae Khamphang, 1994) 10.

¹⁷ Haksar ix.

¹⁸ Edgerton xxxvi.

¹⁹ H.V. Sreenivasa Murthy,

<http://www.freeindia.org/biographies/greatkings/Vikramāditya/index.htm>.

Each story of King Vikramāditya in the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* is narrated to King Bhoja of Dhārā by the thirty-two statuettes decorated on the throne, the *Simhāsana* which once belonged to King Vikramāditya. After his death the great city declines and the throne also disappears. As time passes, King Bhoja discovers the throne again, and he attempts to ascend it. However, on each step as he tries to mount the throne, one of the statuettes comes to life and interrupts him by recounting the deeds of King Vikramāditya, manifesting his magnanimity, his benevolence, his courage, his steadfastness, his righteousness, and then asks King Bhoja if he possesses the great virtues equivalent to King Vikrama.

Actually, these thirty-two statuettes are the celestial nymphs who come to be transfixed to the throne as the result of a curse of Goddess Pārvaṭi. They will be released only after telling the thirty-two deeds of King Vikramāditya to King Bhoja.

From this frame of story, it is apparent that King Vikramāditya is regarded as an ideal king, a perfect model of an emperor. In the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā*, his glory is not brought by the military victory, but by his generosity and compassion which are woven with the honesty to his duty as a king and devotion to Gods. King Vikramāditya is characterized as a virtuous and very magnanimous king who can give everything to others. In ten out of thirty-two stories, he sacrifices his own life.

Firstly, in seven stories, he devoutly sacrifices his life to Gods and then asks for a boon in order to help others, especially the people in his kingdom.

For example, in the second story, King Vikramāditya finds an old brāhmin who makes sacrifices to Goddess Umā for the rest of his life, but the Goddess never appeared to him. With great compassion, the king wishes to help this old brāhmin, so he decides to sacrifice his life to Goddess Umā. When the king is about to pierce his neck with his dagger, the Goddess forestalls him. Umā gives the brāhmin a boon as the king asks. She also says that she is satisfied by the king's sacrifice because he sacrificed with true devotion, unlike the old brāhmin who repeatedly performs sacrifices but without devotion.

When beads are told only with the fingertips,
 when they are told unmindful of the round
 completed, and when they are told
 with thoughts somewhere else:
 in all these the effort is fruitless.²⁰

In the seventh story, the king enters into a shrine of the Goddess. There he sees a beautiful couple, a man and a woman, their heads separated from their bodies. He sees a stone inscription saying, "These two will come to life whenever some hero offers his own head here as a sacrifice." Having seen this, the king's mind is filled with compassion. He says to himself:

If a man can help others,
 But does not do so, this error
 Will lose him his own soul
 Which he may have earlier gained.²¹

But when he raises a sword to his throat to cut his head, the Goddess restrains his hand. She is pleased with the king's great sacrifice and reveals to him that this arrangement is made only as a test.

In the eighth story, there is an empty tank with God Viṣṇu the Waterborne in the middle. A verse inscribed on a stone pillar says that this tank will be filled with water only if a virtuous man bearing the thirty-two auspicious marks first sprinkles it with the blood from his neck. Having seen this, the noble king who bears the thirty-two auspicious marks says to himself.

If I sprinkle the blood from my neck in this tank, it will get filled with water. This will benefit all people. It is a time of glory for me today, that I am in a position to help others. This body is bound to perish. Who knows what will happen, and when? Meanwhile I must fill this tank. Life is transitory, but fame abides as long as the moon and the stars.²²

²⁰ Haksar 48.

²¹ Haksar 69-70.

²² Haksar 73.

As the king puts a sword to his throat, the God holds the blade, praises him, and gives him a boon. The king therefore asks God Viṣṇu to make the pond full of water for the benefit of all, but his coming to the pond and his sacrifice should be known to no one. This apparently manifests his humility.

In the twenty-fifth story, Vikramāditya sacrifices his life to the God to relieve a drought in his kingdom. The king's utterance shows his compassion towards his people and his duty to protect them from sufferings.

The king was deeply distressed at the sufferings of his people. "If the head of a family sees his family suffering," he said to himself, "and does not care for it as much as he can, it is sinful of him. If the head of a village does not care for the suffering villagers, it is sinful too. And if the lord of a country levies taxes on it, but does not protect it when it suffers, it is indeed a sin for him."²³

Finally, in the twenty-eighth story, he sacrifices his life to Goddess Duragā in place of a man who is terrified of death. The Goddess is satisfied with his courage. The king asks for a boon that no one will be killed as a sacrifice again. He is praised by people:

The tree suffers the sharp summer heat
upon its head, but with its shade
it gives comfort to those
who seek shelter under it.
this is your nature too.
unmindful of your own ease,
you endure pains every day
for the sake of the people.²⁴

Secondly, in two stories, he sacrifices his life to the devil ogres in place of others. For example, in the eleventh story, King Vikramāditya sacrifices his body to an ogre in place of others. The story says that the ogre is very surprised as he sees the king lie down on the rock and

²³ Haksar 148.

²⁴ Haksar 161-162.

wait for him with a smiling face. So he asks why the king looks so happy, unlike a dying person. Vikramāditya, therefore, explains that a wise one is always ready to die because he has done all his duties perfectly. His mind is serene and fearless; there is nothing to be nervous of.

People tremble before death, mostly
because they have not done their duties.
those who have done what they should
await the arrival of death
like that of a friend.²⁵

The ogre is satisfied by this answer, so he releases the king and promises not to kill people as food anymore.

The same plotline and expression are also found in *Jayadissa Jātaka*, the *Jātaka-atthakathā*. The prince bodhisattva volunteers to give his body as food to an ogre in place of his father. He surprises the ogre with his serene face as the ogre asks:

There is no creature, prince, that is not afraid of death. Why are not you afraid?

The bodhisattva thus replies:

No evil deed of mine at all,
Open or secret, I recall:
Well weighed are birth and death by me,
As here, so 'tis in worlds to be.
Eat me today, O mighty one,
And do the deed that must be done.
I'll fall down dead from some high tree,
Then eat my flesh, as pleaseth thee.²⁶

Thirdly, in the fifteenth story, the king sacrifices his life to prove his courage by jumping into a pot full of boiling oil. However, he also

²⁵ Haksar 87.

²⁶ E.B. Cowell, ed., *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*. Vol. V, trans. H.T. Francis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905) 16-17.

shows his liberality by giving the result of the boon to his chaplain instead.

The characterization of King Vikrama in the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* is totally different from that in the *Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā*, another story about King Vikrama. At the end of the story Vetāla is satisfied by Vikramāditya's wisdom and virtue; he tells the king that Kṣāntiśīla would deceive him and kill him. If this deception were in the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā*, Vikramāditya may meekly let Kṣāntiśīla kill him (and be rescued afterwards by Gods). But this time, he does not let the yogī do so. He kills Kṣāntiśīla as suggested. This demonstrates the change of the character of Vikramāditya in different texts. In the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā*, his generosity is emphasized, while his intelligence is focused instead in the *Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā*.

To understand the self-sacrifice of King Vikramāditya, we may consider it through the *Dharmaśāstra* texts which, according to the study of Heim, are closely connected to the values and context of statecraft and kingship (rājadharmā), and its attendant royal and religious duties, including the practice of *Mahādāna*s or the 'Weight of a Man Gift,' which is the giving of body weight in gold or silver... to gurus, brāhmins, and then to the poor. This giving is a symbolic offering of the king's body; it means he gives himself entirely.²⁷

This practice shows the ideal of kingship, that is, the ability to endlessly satisfy the desires of the recipient, rather than his ability to flaunt abundance haphazardly as a perverse pleasure of the rich and powerful. The royal *Mahādāna*s are the means by which king with imperial aspirations may attempt to rise to the top.²⁸ In addition, the *Dharmaśāstra* texts say that a king should practice the gift of fearlessness by protecting his subjects from all sorts of terror.²⁹

²⁷ Maria Heim, *Theories of the Gift in South Asia: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Reflections on Dana* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004) 114-115.

²⁸ Heim 114-116.

²⁹ Heim 162.

If we apply the concept of the duty and the symbolic giving of the body of a king from the *Dharmaśāstra* texts to the deeds of King Vikramāditya in the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā*, we may see that he is an ideal king. His self-sacrifice shows that, firstly, he entirely gives himself to all kinds of people; he endlessly satisfies the desires of the recipients, no matter how good or bad they are; he protects his people, or in the other word, gives his people the gift of fearlessness (*abhaya-dāna*). Secondly, he devoutly worships and honours Gods with his life. Therefore, through the giving of life, King Vikramāditya proves his compassion, his true devotion to the Gods, his duty as a king to protect people, his courage, and his righteousness as a great emperor, king of kings.

The Significance of the King Bodhisattva's Self-sacrifice

From the comparison, it seems that many elements of the king's self-sacrifice in the Buddhist narratives and the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā* are quite similar. There are, indeed, the kings who sacrifice their lives, there are gods who test the kings, there are many kinds of recipients – some are the great deities or the Buddha, some are good, and some are bad. However, the explanation or the use of self-sacrifice in the Buddhist narratives is distinctly different, namely the self-sacrifice of a king is merged with the concept of *Dānapāramī*. It is not to prove the king the greatest emperor *per se*, but it is used to demonstrate the ultimate level of the perfection of generosity. The king bodhisattvas sacrifice their lives to fulfill the perfection. They prove their uncompromising compassion, and otherworldly wisdom – the wisdom of renunciation from 'self', which includes the renouncing of worldly pleasure, of the throne or kingship and all royal properties. Also, they demonstrate their strong intention and great devotion to the Buddha and the Dhamma. Thus, through the sacrifice, the bodhisattvas completely become 'qualified'. Buddhahood is their ultimate goal, not the worldly pleasure or the fame as a great conqueror.

Why do the bodhisattvas who sacrifice their lives have to be a king? What is the significance of the 'king bodhisattva'?

Before figuring out the answer of these questions, the concept of ‘ideal king’ in Buddhism should be considered from two Pāli suttas: the *Aggañña Sutta* and the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*. The *Aggañña Sutta* tells the origin of ‘a king’ in human society. Also, it gives three significant terms which are used to call ‘king’ and explains their meanings. The first one is ‘mahā-sammata’ which means the one who is chosen by the people; the second one is ‘khattiya’ which means the lord of the field; and the other is ‘rāja’ which means the one who gladdens others with Dhamma.

In the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*, in order to maintain the peace of the society, a Cakkavatti or emperor must respect ‘Dhamma’ and rule the kingdom with ‘Dhamma’. He must take good care of the welfare of the people; he has to make sure that the facilities are distributed to the people and support their careers appropriately. This is also paralleled in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, as King Mahāvijita is advised to do this before making a sacrifice.

It seems that the Buddhist concept of ideal king from the two suttas sounds similar to the concept in the *Dharmaśāstra* and the deeds of King Vikramāditya, but it has mostly nothing to do with the self-sacrifice of the king bodhisattvas in the narratives under study. Although the bodhisattvas give their bodies to satisfy the recipients, such as Sakka in disguise, their purpose is not to satisfy the recipients *per se*, but Awakening or Buddhahood, as they clearly proclaim the aspiration to obtain the omniscience before giving of limbs and life.

All deities, may you be the divine witness of my word. As now I give my body and life as food for the ogre in exchange for the Buddha’s teaching, I aspire not to the bliss of human world, nor of heavens, nor of Brahma world; I aspire not to become an Arahāt, nor a Paccekabuddha; I aspire not to the bliss of Catulokapāla, nor Cakkavatti, nor the six heavens, nor the sixteen Brahma worlds. I relinquish them only for the sake of Buddhahood, only to become a Buddha the omniscient one in the future, in order to release myself and then bring all sentient beings across the ocean of saṃsāra.

(*Dharmasonḍaka Jātaka*)³⁰

³⁰ *Paññāsa Jātaka (Thai National Library Collection)*, 2 Vols, 2nd ed. (Bangkok: Silapa Bannakhan, 2006) 278-279.

This seems to support the idea that the king bodhisattvas in the narratives do not practice self-sacrifice as a worldly king. They are not doing the duty of kings; they are not 'protecting' their people. The bodhisattvas sacrifice their lives only for Buddhahood, to become a Buddha who relieves all sentient beings of suffering. As they give up everything even their own lives, they completely renounce kingship and fulfil their otherworldly goal. Therefore, what the narratives in which the king bodhisattvas sacrifice their lives are trying to convey is not the practice to be a good king, but a practice to be a 'qualified' bodhisattva.

So, why king? And what is the significance of the bodhisattva who is a king and sacrifices his life?

Firstly, the institution of kingship and Buddhahood are closely associated. The Buddha himself is born as a prince in the Kṣatriya caste before the great renunciation. Since he is endowed with the thirty-two auspicious marks, he would become a Cakkavatti, a wheel-turning monarch if he had kept to the household life. However, he renounces it and becomes a fully-enlightened Buddha. As a Buddha, still, he is regarded as the Dhammarāja, the "King of Dhamma", and the Cakkavatti, the "Wheel-turning king of the (excellent) Good Dhamma". His supreme power conquers all realms. His power can refer either..., to the area over which his teaching extends..., or to the area over which the protection verses (paritta) he teaches is effective."³¹

Samuels also argues: "the relationship between kings and bodhisattvas has its source in the bodhisattva career of Gotama as depicted not only in his life as Prince Siddhārtha..., but also in his penultimate earthly life when he was King Vessantara."³²

In addition, it is evident from the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta* that the practice of a great man to become a Cakkavatti, the greatest king, and a Buddha,

³¹ Steven Collins, *Nirvāṇa and other Buddhist Felicities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 472.

³² Jeffrey Samuels, "The Bodhisattva Ideal in Theravada Buddhist Theory and Practice: A Reevaluation of the Bodhisattva-Śrāvaka Opposition," *Philosophy East and West* 47, 3 (July 1997): 404.

who both bear the thirty-two auspicious marks, is equivalent. It is noteworthy that the practice that makes the great man acquire the mark of thousand-spoked wheels, complete with the felloe and hub is:

Dispelling fright and panic fear,
Eager to guard and give defense³³

In history, the amalgamation between the institution of kingship and bodhisattvas is apparent in many Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand; many kings openly declared themselves to be bodhisattvas.³⁴ For example, in Sri Lanka, King Sirisaṃghabodhi, compared to Mañicūḍa, fulfilled the desire of his enemies by sacrificing his life. The story is told in the Pāli *Haṭṭhavanagallavihāravaṃsa*, a history of the temple of Haṭṭhavanagalla in Ceylon, the site where the king offered his head.³⁵ In Thailand, Thai kings are also regarded as a Buddha or a Buddha-to-be. Many inscriptions demonstrate their aspiration to attain Buddhahood when they performed merit. The thought and tradition are still strong even in the modern days. The king of Thailand, as a Buddhist king, is always praised for his great virtue as he cultivates the ten Rājadharmas, which can be paralleled to the ten perfections.³⁶ The deed of a king is equivalent to the deed of a bodhisattva.

Secondly, having considered the Buddha as the greatest king of all kings, the jātakas which tell of the great deeds in the Buddha's previous lives, therefore, can be regarded as hero tales or 'religious hero tales'.³⁷

³³ Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1995) 444.

³⁴ Samuels 404-405.

³⁵ Ratna Handurukande, *Mañicūḍāvadāna Lokānanda: Being a Translation and Edition and a Transliteration and Synopsis* (London: The Pāli Text Society, 1967) xxxii.

³⁶ Somdet Phra Nāṇasaṃvara, *Dasapāramī-Ḍaṣabidharājadharmā*, 3rd ed., (Bangkok: Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya, 1999).

³⁷ Some jātakas, such as *Vessantara Jātaka* can be regarded even as 'epic'. See Winternitz (1993: 152f.), Alsdorf (1957: 70), Gombrich (1977: iii), Collins (1998: 498f., 530) and Meiland (2003).

Generally, it is common to see a hero tale having a 'king' as the hero because in the society, the king is on the top of the hierarchy and he is expected to be a courageous person with very strong religious faith. He is expected to be the model to the people. Therefore, it is likewise common that most of the bodhisattvas, the heroes in the jātakas, will be a king. With the use of 'king' as the hero in the jātakas, the religious message is easily conveyed to the audience. The audience will be impressed by the great self-sacrifice or great renunciation of the king bodhisattvas and may 'imitate' them in terms of the generous giving, apply such heroic acts on a number of different levels of stringency to their own practice in daily life.

Thirdly, it is because of '*the paradox of kingship*.' The king bodhisattvas who sacrifice their lives demonstrate the benefit and the nothingness of kingship at the same time. The benefit of being a king is that he is rich enough to give without condition. A very rich king bodhisattva who thirsts in giving all the time would give and give until he realizes that there is nothing worthy enough to give except his own life. Therefore, eventually, the kingship is nothing to him. The royal properties cannot satisfy the otherworldly aspiration to become a Buddha anymore, so it is very easy to renounce them and give himself entirely.

The benefit and the nothingness of kingship parallel the Buddha's method of teaching—*Anupubbikathā*—which begins with the giving and the benefit of giving that is worldly pleasure. Then the Buddha will teach that one should take the precept in order to develop one's life and one's mind. After that, the Buddha will assert the demerit of worldly pleasure, and then assert the merit of renunciation and will end his teaching by the explanation of the Four Noble Truths, which is the direct path to Nibbāna.

Also, the nothingness of kingship can be considered from the life of the Buddha. It is apparent that he rejects the royalty, becomes homeless and seeks liberation. This message is likewise conveyed in many jātakas, such as *Mahājanaka Jātaka* and *Temīya Jātaka* in which the bodhisattva renounces the world and becomes an ascetic. These two jātakas assure another angle of the disadvantage of kingship and glorify the renunciation. In the Bagh caves, it is explicit that the paintings of

Mahājanaka Jātaka expound the perfection of renunciation as the scenes of the royal garden and the two mango trees are chosen and represented.³⁸ For *Temiya Jātaka*, Collins argues that it “declares kingship to be ‘wrongdoing’ (adhamma-cariya) and twice refers to royal activity as criminal.” In Thai Buddhist tradition, the story of *Temiya* is, therefore, associated with the perfection of renunciation.³⁹

Finally, one of the important missions of literature is to create emotion in the mind of the audience. In didactic works, especially jātakas, religious teaching and aestheticism are interwoven. The ‘intellectual emotions’ play a very significant role in conveying the didactic message.⁴⁰

In this sense, the great status of a king makes the self-sacrifice more dramatic, such as in *Siricuḍāmaṇi Jātaka*. Amidst the weeping of the consort, crown prince, and ministers, a greatest and most beloved king, the highest one in the kingdom, cuts his own body with a peacefully smiling face and delighted heart. At the same time, all the deities and nature praise his great sacrifice with great joy. This dramatic scene creates the sentiments of *karuṇārāsa* (pity) and *vīrarāsa* (courage)⁴¹ and inspires the audience. Supported by these sentiments, the didactic message is therefore conveyed to the audience effectively.

³⁸ Meena V. Talim, “Jātakas: In Ajanta and Bagh Paintings a Comparative Study,” *Indica* 44, 2 (September 2007): 107-109, 103-114. This is different from Thai traditional mural painting of *Mahājanaka Jātaka* in which the scene of the shipwreck is always represented to expound the perfection of perseverance.

³⁹ Collins 434.

⁴⁰ Vladimir I. Braginsky, *The Comparative Study of Traditional Asian Literatures: from Reflective Traditionalism to Neo-Traditionalism* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000).

⁴¹ Gupta (2001: 2503) argues that ‘dānavīra’ which arises from giving gifts is one of three types of the heroic sentiment accepted by the rhetoricians. The other two are ‘yuddhavīra’ and ‘dharmavīra’ which arise from fighting and fulfilling one’s duty respectively.

Conclusion

From the comparison between the self-sacrifice of the kings in the *Paññāsa Jātaka*, the *Anāgatavaṃsa* and the *Simhāsana Dvātrimśikā*, we can examine the internal gift, or the ultimate level of the perfection of generosity in Buddhist narratives, from another point of view, as the motif of the king's self-sacrifice is found both in Thai Buddhist narratives and Hindu narratives. A motif or a plotline of a story is widespread and then woven with the religious thoughts and ideologies in the context. Also, this study is another demonstration of the close relationship between the Indian and Thai civilization.

The self-sacrifice of the kings in the texts under study, no matter whether they are Buddhist narratives or Hindu narratives, seem to inspire us to develop ourselves, to be a more generous person, and not to attach too much to the ephemeral worldly pleasures but search for the true meaning of living, that is do not live for oneself only but learn to live for others. As the aspiration of King Bhoja stated at the end:

May the might, majesty and fame, the generosity and the steadfastness
increase of all mortals who narrate or listen to the deeds of Vikramāditya.
May these deeds remain forever famous on earth.⁴²

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⁴² Hasker 179.

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