

IMPRESSIVE SIMILES IN TIPITAKA (I) : A SIMILE OF FIVE THIEVES



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ABSTRACT

It is not only the intensive research about the simile has discovered the importance, but the purpose and the roles of them also found in the entire Canonical scriptures. The Buddha uses similes as one of the most powerful methods of his teaching. The character and the nature of the simile that have already been studied, is that, they help the majority of the people understand the Dhamma easily. This article, therefore, attempts to dig deeply those similes in the Pāli Nikāyas. The Simile of Five Thieves is the first and impressive one to be deemed, herein. This Simile is the way of teaching that the Buddha uses to explain an intricate concept of “a grave fault involving removal from monkhood” known as “Defeat” or “Offence” (*pārājika*) due to a state of devoid of superhuman condition of a monk.

Keywords: Buddhist simile, Defeat, *pārājika*, thieves, state of further-men

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the various methods of the Buddha's teachings, the similes are the very successful method found in the entire Canonical scriptures. The simile is called 'upamā' in the Nikāyas. The term 'upamā' has been defined as a figure of speech by means of which a statement is made of "Some point of resemblance conceived to exist between two things that differ in other respects." A simile implies comparison, bringing out the similarity between two things for the purpose of elucidating some points. The Pāli term 'upamā' has been translated into English as "similitude", "simile", "illustration", "figure", "allegory", and "parable" etc.¹ When comparison is very simple, it is called simile. In a simile, the likeness is asserted. A simile may also be extended in various ways, as such into a story.

The Buddha proclaims his doctrines by way of similes in order to convey the meaning clearly on the particular subject that the He was teachings. In case of the Teaching was difficult to understand and the audiences seemed unable to understand the particular subject, the Buddha expressed his teaching by the way of similes. This was very impressive for the listeners rather than passing the essence of teaching by using technical points.

2. SIMILES IN TĪPIṬAKA

A simile is, of course, a comparison of one thing to another. In other words, it is a comparative word between two different things. For example, he is as dreadful as a *cora* (a robber or a thief). Similies in the Tīpiṭaka can be divided into three categories, due to their content, as follows: 1) Those that reflect the social life, 2) Those that are endowed with a humorous character, and (3) Those that are based on observation of nature.

According to the Pāli Nikāyas, the roles of similes can be studied of four aspects: (1) Delivering religious discourse, (2) delivering ethical discourse, (3) argumentative discourse and (4) poetic discourse. Similes are often used for the purpose of delivering a religious discourse.²

¹Edward E. Nourse, "Parable", in **Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics**, vol. IX, ed., James Hastings, (New York: Charles scribner's Sons, 1917), p. 628.

²Eugene Watson Burlingame, **Buddhist Parable**, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1991), p. xxi.

Besides, the specific purposes of using similes found in the Nikāyas are of three different categories, namely: to suggest a meaning,³ to elucidate the meaning,⁴ and convey the Dhamma to be understood by the wise. The Nikāyas contain a huge number of similes. For instance, one section of the Majjhimanikāya is employed as the Group of Similes (*Opammavagga*).

The simile is one of methods of preaching Dhamma used by the Buddha known as *vetalla*—a dialogue or debate between two persons such as between King Pāyāsi and Venerable Kumra Kassapa, or between King Milinda and Nāgasena Thera.⁵

Let us start with similes in the Vinaya Piṭaka which are divided into three parts, namely:

1) Vibhaṅga

It is classified as the Bhikkhu Vibhaṅga (monk's Training Rules of 227); and the *Bhikkhunī Vibhanga* (Nun's Training Rules of 311).

2) Khandhakas

This part contains 22 Khandhakas.

3) Parivāra

It is a manual of the Discipline.

3. THE SIMILE OF FIVE THIEVES

The Simile of Five Thieves exists in the Bhikkhu Vibhaṅga. This simile concerns the fourth Defeat rule. The 'Defeat' or *pārājika* in Pāli, pertaining to the Parivāra, is stemmed from a verb, meaning "to lose or be defeated". Defeated to what? Actually, it means a monk who has defeated to his own mental defilements and committed a grave misbehaviour of the rules for bhikkhus that he has accepted in the first place and has to be removed from the monkhood.

In sum, *pārājika* signifies the heaviest penalty that automatically and forever ends the Bhikkhu life. It consists of four sets of rules: 1) Sexual intercourse (meaning 'Not to

³M II 260; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha** (Majjhimanikāya), (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995), p. 867.

⁴J III 131; E. B. Cowell (tr.), **The Jātaka**, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 131.

⁵See also *Pāyāsisutta* in **Dīghanikāya**; and **Milinda Pañhā** (PTS).

have sexual intercourse'), 2) Theft (meaning 'Not to steal'), 3) Murder (meaning 'Not to commit murder'), and 4) Claim about non-obtained realizations (meaning 'Not to claim attainments of stages of pure mental concentration that have not been achieved').

If a monk violates any of those four offenses, it implies that he has surrendered to his own mental defilements. He then loses himself irreversibly from the life of the Saṅgha and is no longer considered a *bhikkhu*. The irretrievable nature of the defeat is illustrated in the Vibhaṅga with numerous similes, for instance, "as a man with his head cut off...as a withered leaf freed from its stem...as a flat stone that has been broken in half cannot be put together again...as a palm tree cut off at the crown is incapable of further growth."

The Simile of Five Thieves sheds light on the monks from the banks of the river Vaggumudā in Vajjī country. At that time, Vajjī was short of alms-food which was difficult to obtain; it was suffering from a famine, and food-tickets were being issued. In order to spend a comfortable rainy season there and will not short of alms-food, they all were harmonious and on friendly terms. Besides, these monks agreed to speak praise to the householders concerning this or that state of superior-men or the non-obtained realization (*uttarimanussadhammā*).⁶ It implies to a violation of the fourth Defeat rule.

The Buddha, when he knew, had rebuked those bhikkhus and said that "It is unsuitable, foolish men, it is not becoming, it is not proper, it is not fitting for a recluse, it is unlawful, it is not to be done."⁷ Moreover, the Blessed One further pointed out that a monk who had vowed to be a *samaṇa* (one whose evil actions have ceased), but behaved against the Bhikkhu rules by boasting "a condition above that of a man" is equivalent to a *cora* (thief). The person deserves to be called a "*Mahā Coro* Monk" or the "great thief monk" according to the following five cases in the discourse shown:

Monks, there are these five great thieves to be found in the world. What are the five? Monks, here a certain one of the great thieves thought: 'To be sure, will I, surrounded by a hundred or by a thousand, wander about among villages, towns, and the possessions of kings, slaying and causing to be slain, destroying and causing destruction, tormenting and causing torment.' He, in the course of time, surrounded by a hundred or by a thousand wanders about among villages, towns,

⁶I.B. Horner (tr.), *Vinaya Piṭaka: Book of Discipline*, vol. 1 (Suttavibhaṅga), (no. 1), (Oxford : PTS, 1992), pp. 151-2.

⁷*ibid.*

and the possessions of kings, slaying and causing to be slain, destroying and causing destruction, tormenting and causing torment. Now indeed, monks, a certain depraved monk thought: ‘To be sure, I, surrounded by a hundred or by a thousand, will make an alms-tour among villages, towns and the possessions of kings, honoured, respected, revered, worshipped, esteemed, supported by householders, by those who have gone forth into homelessness, and by the requisites of robes, alms, bedding and medicine. He, in the course of time, surrounded by a hundred, by a thousand, made an alms-tour among villages, towns and the possessions of kings, honoured, respected, revered, worshipped, esteemed, supported by householders and receiving the requisites of robes, alms, bedding and medicine for those who go forth into homelessness. This, monks, is the first great thief found existing in the world.

Again, monks, here a certain depraved monk, having mastered thoroughly dhamma and the discipline made known by the Tathāgata, takes it for his own. This, monks, is the second great thief found existing in the world.

Again, monks, here a certain depraved monk, blames a follower of the pure Brahma-life, one leading the absolutely pure Brahma-life. This, monks, is the third great thief found existing in the world.

Again, monks, a certain depraved monk favours and cajoles a householder on account of those things which are important possessions of the Order, on account of those things which are its important requisites, that is to say, a park, a site for a park, a vihāra, a site for a vihāra, a couch, a chair, a bolster, a pillow, a brass vessel, a brass jar, a brass pot, a brass receptacle, a razor, an axe, a hatchet, a hoe, a spade, a creeper, bamboo, muñja-grass, babbaja-grass, tiṇa-grass, clay wooden articles, earthenware articles. This, monks, is the fourth great thief found existing in the world.

Monks, in the world with the devas and including Māra, including the Brahmā-world, including recluses and brahmins, including breathing things, including devas and men, this is the chief great thief: he who claims a non-existent state of further-men, which has not become. What is the reason for this? Monks, you have eaten the country’s almsfood by theft.⁸

⁸*ibid.*, pp. 155-7.

Aside from those, the Buddha had rebuked them in various ways that they were difficult to maintain, difficult to support, immoral, uncontrolled, wicked, of evil qualities, etc. Finally, the Blessed One set forth the course of training this:

Whatever monk should boast, with reference to himself, of a state of furthermen, sufficient ariyan knowledge and insight, though not knowing it fully, saying: ‘this I know, this I see; then not long afterwards, he, being pressed or not being pressed, fallen, should desire to be purified and should say: ‘Your reverence, I said that I know what I do not know, see what I do not see, I spoke, falsely, vainly,’ then he also is one who is defeated, he is not in communion.⁹

4. REMARK ON THE SIMILE

The first type of thief, according to the Buddha, is the depraved monk who has intention to make a large number of people his followers, and to capture the villages, districts, towns, and the country to which people worship, esteem and pay respect. He and his followers make many alms-tours among such the villages, districts or towns that are supported by rich householders in order to increase numbers of retinues and to collect the four requisites and material wealth.

In the same way, one who becomes a monk because of respect, praise, material things, rich supporters or many followers, and does not ordain for the purpose of the end of suffering or the realization of *nibbāna*, is like the first great thief in the Buddha’s simile.

The second great thief is analogous to one who intentionally takes or copies the other individuals’ intellect property such as the teaching, innovation, ideas, researches, reports, novel, and so on for his own; or proclaims the right over the others’ intellect property as if it “belongs to himself”. This kind of behaviour is the same as that of the monk in the Buddha’s simile—the one who proclaims the teaching of the Blessed One as “his own teaching”. Therefore, he or she is considered the second great thief, pertaining to the Buddha’s teaching.

⁹*ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

The third great thief is a type of an individual who charges his neighbour, friends, or followers (students) who perform good- and pure-dhamma life without ‘ground’ (*mūla*) and justification. This includes a case of a monk who accuses his monk-friend of the Defeat rule without ‘ground’ for accusation. Hence, he is supposed to be called the “third great thief (monk)” in Buddhism.

The fourth great thief involves a kind of monk who flatters his householders for a large donation, an *uposatha* (a hall for reciting), a temple, a refrigerator, a car, an air-conditioned house (*kuṭi*), land, or other material things, and also with a monk who gives *saṅgha-bhaṇḍa* (the Order’s materials) and the Saṅgha’s heavy property to laymen in order to find favour with the persons. Furthermore, this misbehaviour can be applied with an individual who takes the common property from his or her relatives, friends, or workplaces without permission from the community. This is called the “fourth great thief” by the Buddha.

The fifth great thief is a sort of one who lives his life with false speech. This includes a monk who lives his bhikkhu’s life by lying. Since he has not been trained in higher meditation, however, boasted that he has entered a higher meditation (*jhāna*) or realized a highest spiritual attainment. For example, claiming to attain such the noblehood as the *Sotāpanna* (the Stream-Enterer), or the *Sakadāgāmi* (the Once-Returner), or the *Anāgāmi* (the Non-Returner), or the Arahant (the Worthy One), or the Maitreya Buddha, or claiming that one is able to read the mind, etc. This is called by the Buddha as the “chief great thief monk” because he has eaten the country’s almsfood by theft.

Those words of the Buddha and his simile attempts to make his followers give up doing bad and wrong things, and walk directly through the right way.

5. CONCLUSION

The Simile of Five Thieves not only reflects the social life of people, their faiths, and their relationship with monks in the time of the Buddha, but also suggests an implication of ‘good’ behaviour and a meaning of ‘bad’ behaviour of some groups of monks happening at that time. In other words, this simile aims to warn bhikkhus not to behave as the five great thieves of the world, but to do good *kamma* for the sake of themselves, the community, and the country. Moreover, the Dhamma delivered by the simile is easily understood by ordinary people. To the author, this simile offers an impressive feeling—especially when thinking that all cases of the five great thief monks of the world had already

happened in our days. To other individuals, however, the Simile may look ordinary or give indifferent feeling. Nevertheless, it is better for each and everyone to learn and research the *Buddhadhamma* freely before putting one's own faith or belief into the instance or following other persons' ideas.

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