

**AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SIMILES
IN THE NIKĀYAS**

VEN. WALMORUWE PIYARATHANA

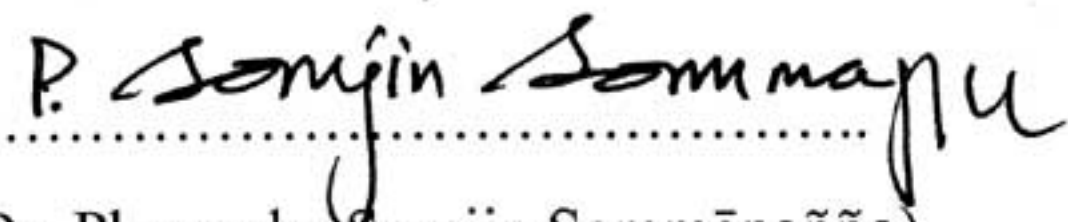
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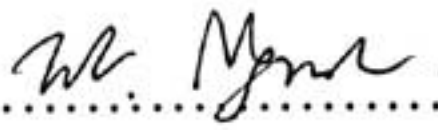

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to discuss the role of similes used by the Buddha and his contemporaries as found in the Nikayas. During the course of this work, I have discovered the following results:

The main reason for the Buddha's use of similes was that of being able to appeal to the different dispositions of his listeners (*puggalavemattatās*). People come from different backgrounds and have different experiences. When the Buddha taught his doctrine, he wanted to explain doctrinal matters in a manner suited to the differences in the background and understanding of his listeners. Using similes was the best method to present the doctrine in a way his audience would find familiar. When doctrinal matters were conveyed by way of similes involving topics with which they were familiar, they could understand them easily.

The Buddha's doctrine is deep in meaning. It penetrates our conceptual knowledge. Our language is based upon our conceptual framework. Therefore, doctrinal points can not always be expressed

through the direct use of language. The Buddha was very careful in his use of language. When he found that direct expression failed to communicate doctrinal matters, he instead used similes to elucidate them. With similes, he was able to go beyond the limits of direct language. Similes proved very useful, particularly when explaining doctrines that were unique to Buddhism. Similes therefore played a vital role in expounding the Buddha's doctrines.

Moreover, similes are of the greatest importance when studying the history of Indian culture. A wide variety of similes depict the daily life of the ancient Indian people, including that of merchants, workers, gamblers, drivers of carts and horses, etc. In such similes, we are able to observe the entire work of various professions, such as that of the goldsmith, and the techniques employed in the whole process of taming elephants, or of healing a man wounded by a poisoned arrow, and so on. Similes considerably enrich, and enhance the value of, Pāli literature.

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Ven W. Piyarathana

Abbreviations

Primary Sources¹

AN	Aṅguttaranikāya
DN	Dīghanikāya
Dhp	Dhammapada
It	Itivuttaka
Jā	Jātaka
MN	Majjhimanikāya
SN	Samyuttanikāya
Sn	Suttanipāta
Su	Subodhālaṅkāra
Th	Theragāthā
Th ²	Therīgāthā
Ud	Udāna

Other Abbreviations

ed.	Edited by
e.g.	For example
etc.	Et cetera
ibid/ibidem	in the same book
i.e.	that is to say
op.cit.	opere citato (work cited)
tr.	translated by
vol(s)	volume(s)

¹ In quoting Pāli sources, the references are given according to the volume and page of the PTS editions. In the case of the *Dhammapada*, the *Sutta Nipāta*, the *Subodhālaṅkāra*, the *Theragāthā* and the *Therīgāthā*, quotations are given by verse number of the PTS editions, instead of page numbers.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance of the Problem

It is very interesting to examine the reasons that led to the expansion of Buddhism in India at its outset. One such was the Buddha's very successful method of teaching. To proclaim the doctrines by way of similes was one of the teaching methods he employed. The person who listens to teachings containing similes realises the point very quickly, because the similes provide a more concrete method for understanding the Dhamma. Similes are found throughout the Buddhist teachings. Therefore, it is essential to understand the importance of the similes: their relation to the Dhamma, the purpose in using them, their individual characteristics, their influence on society, and whether they have universal, or merely particular, application, and so on.

In this thesis, I attempt to examine the way in which the Buddha and his disciples made use of similes. I will examine only similes in the strict sense of the term. To take up this task, I, firstly, present a general introduction of the concept of the simile. This concept will then be discussed further, by way of such similes' classification, and their remarkable features, such as spontaneity, simplicity and aptness. The main part of this research will focus on the use and function of the simile in the Nikāyas. We will first turn to the specific purposes of using similes.

*Upamā kho me ayam Sunakkhatta katā atthassa viññāpanāya*¹

(Sunakkhatta, I have given this simile in order to convey a meaning.)

*Esā te upamā rāja attha sandassanī katā*²

(Your majesty, these similes are used for the purpose of elucidating the meaning)

*Tena hi rājāñña upamā te karissami, upamāyā p' idh' ekacce viññū purisā bhāsitass atthaṃ ājānanti*³.

(Well, then, Prince, I will give you a simile, because some wise people understand what is said by means of similes)

According to these quotations, the purpose of using similes in the Nikāyas is clear. However, similes do not express their meaning directly, but use concrete, material objects to convey the Dhamma. If an individual fails to understand a simile, it may lead to misunderstanding or wrong view.

The Buddha skillfully delivered his teaching by paying special attention to the particular situation or the temperament of each individual

¹ MN. II. 2 60, tr., Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, (Majjhimanikāya), (Kandy: BPS, 1995), p. 867.

² Jā III. 131., E.B. Cowell, tr., *The Jātaka*, (Oxford, PTS), p.131.

³ DN. III.330., Maurice Walshe, tr., *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, (Dīghanikāya), (Kandy: BPS, 1996), p.357.

he was addressing. The Buddha's teaching in the Suttapiṭaka consists of five Nikāyas, namely, the Dīghanikāya, Majjhimanikāya, Saṃyuttanikāya, Aṅguttaranikāya and Khuddakanikāya.

The simile is a figure of speech that is very useful for expressing an idea or a concept. Their stereotypical instruction occurs in almost all Pāli Suttas. It is used for the purpose of conveying religious and ethical teaching, and helps to illustrate an intended meaning effectively. It enables the audience to understand clearly that which is abstract and intricate. The simile thus serves many useful purposes.

The Nikāyas contain of a considerable number of similes. One section of the Majjhimanikāya is entitled as the "Group of Similes" (*Opammavagga*). Of the 423 verses of the Dhammapada, 315 verses are in the form of similes. Those similes can be classified into certain groups.

1.2 Objectives of Research

1.2.1 To find the critical meaning of the similes.

1.2.2 To study the purpose in using similes in the Pali Nikāyas.

1.2.3 To study the significance of the similes depicted in the Nikāyas.

1.3 Definitions of the Terms Used in Research

Upamā: 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 point. The Pāli term *upamā* has been translated as “similitude”, “simile”, “illustration”, “figure”, “allegory” and “parable”. A type of figure of speech applied in a peculiar way can be called a “simile”, “metaphor”, “allegory”, “fable” or “parable”.

1.4 Review of the Literature and Research Works Associated with the Research.

1.4.1 In this study, I deal only with similes in the Nikāyas. In the main, I use Romanized editions, and I make use of various translations in accordance with their availability.

1.4.2 C.A.F. Rhys Davids, “Similes in the Nikāyas” in the Journal of the Pāli Text Society, Vol.IX, Oxford: PTS, 1906-1907

Abstract: This article provides a general introduction to the similes and their significance. Furthermore, it lists all the similes that appear in the Suttantapiṭaka.

1.4.3 Eugene Watson Burlingame, *Buddhist Parable*, Delhi, Motilal Bandarsidas, 1991

Abstract: The book contains a general introduction to the Buddhist parable and a translation of a selection of similes.

1.4.4 Ñāṇasiri, Poravagama The Parable of the Buddha
(Buduhamuduru vange Upama Kata), Colombo, Gunasena, 2004

Abstract: This book contains 125 selected parables from the Nikāyas. The book is in Sinhala.

1.4.5 Pandita, Sudharma, The Role of Similes in the Pāli
Nikāyas. Sri Lanka, Buddhist Philosophy and Cultural Center, Sri
Lanka, 1987

Abstract: This book examines the use and function of similes in the Pāli Nikāyas, and cites very famous and important similes.

1.5 Method of Research

The purpose of this research is to examine the use and the significance of similes in the Nikāyas. It consists of a textual study and can be divided into four stages:

1.5.1 Collecting the similes from the Nikāyas, namely, Dīghanikāya, Majjhimanikāya, Saṃyuttanikāya, Aṅguttaranikāya and Khuddakanikāya, and classifying them into various groups, such as: similes dealing with ancient Indian life, similes dealing with human beings, and similes based on observation of nature, and so on.

1.5.2 Explaining the use of similes and their importance for an understanding of the Dhamma

1.5.3 Finding the real meaning of the similes and then arranging them into groups by way of the meanings they convey; drawing conclusions and making suggestions for further research

1.6 Expected Benefits to be Obtained from the Research

1.6.1 To achieve an understanding of the reason for using similes in order to communicate Buddhist doctrine

1.6.2 To discover a better way of ascertaining the meaning of the similes for the benefit of all people.

1.6.3 To discern the significance of the similes as depicted in the Nikāyas.

Chapter 2

The Significance and Divisions of Upamā

2.1 Definition of Similes

In this chapter, I will explain the classification of similes according to *Alaṅkāra*. Accordingly, a simile 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”.⁴ In this chapter, I hope to classify the similes appearing in the Pāli Nikāyas. Similes entail comparison, bringing out the similarity between two things for the purpose of elucidating some point.⁵ The Pāli term *upamā* has been translated as a “similitude”, “simile”, “illustration”, “figure”, “allergy”, and “parable”.⁶ A figure of speech applied in peculiar way can be called a simile, metaphor, allegory, fable or parable. This concept can be further explained as follows:

When comparison is very simple—e.g., “that man is like a lion”—it is called simile. In a simile, the likeness is openly asserted (by ‘as’ or ‘like’, etc). When the word denoting comparison is omitted, the figure is called metaphor—e.g. ‘That man is a lion’. A sustained metaphor, i.e., an extended statement in which the significant terms all stand for something else, is an allegory. A simile may also be extended in various ways. It may be

⁴ Everyman’s Encyclopedia, ed., Athelstan Ridway, 1950

⁵ H.G.A.Zeyst, ‘Analogies’, Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Vol I, ed, G.P.Malasekara, 1965.

⁶ Robert Caesar Childers, A Dictionary of Pali Language, (New Delhi, Asian Educational Service, 1993).

expanded into a story. If the action, in addition to being imagined, is unreal (animal conversing, etc), it is usually called a fable. If the action is possible – if we can say that it may have happened-the story is usually called a parable.⁷

In the Buddhist texts, similes are developed in more detail. Long similes are usually introduced by the adverb of comparison *seyyathā* (just as)⁸; whereas in shorter ones one tends to find the comparison introduced by simpler terms, such *yathā* (as)⁹, or followed by indeclinable such as *iva* (as)¹⁰ or *viya*¹¹. In Sanskrit poetic writings, there are more than thirty words that are used to denote a simile.¹²

2.2 The Significance and Divisions of Upamā in Alaṅkāra

Next, I will discuss the significance and divisions of similes according to the *Alaṅkāra*. It is the most important part of the *Alaṅkāra*. Similes are found even in the Vedic literature. Winternitz states that the “Simile has played an important part in Indian literature at all times”¹³. It is one of the figures of expression, which must be included in the great poems, or *Mahākāvya*. Dandī, who was the author of the *Kāvyādarśa*, spent 51 *śloka*s (verses) explaining similes. Where likeness in some respect appears conspicuous, the figure of speech is called *upamā*.¹⁴

⁷ Edward E. Nurse, “Parable”, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed., James Hastings, (1995).

⁸ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit., p.227.

⁹ *Selo yathā ekaghano vatena na samīrati evaṃ nindā paṣaṃsāsu na samijjhanti paṇḍitā*, Dhṛp. 81.

¹⁰ *Nidhīnaṃ va pavattāraṃ*, 76

¹¹ *Vassikā viya pupphāni - maddavāni pamuñcati evaṃ rāgaṇ ca dosaṇ ca vipṇamuñ c’ ettha bhikkhavo*, Dhṛp. 377

¹² C.Sankara Rama, op.cit., p.151

¹³ M.Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. II, (Calcutta, Fasc,1959), p.3

¹⁴ *Yathā kathaṇīthañcit sādruśya athrotbhūtaṃ prakāśyate upamā nāma sā tasyā prapañcyaṃ nidaśyate.*

(C.Sankara Ramasastri, *Kāvyadarśa*, (Madras, The Sri Balamanorama,1963), p.116).

When the *upamā* and the *upameyya* (subject of the comparison) both take the same figure, it is called a “simile”. It is to be understood as being without any tension. There are four parts to a simile¹⁵. These are:

1. *Upamāna*: an object is relevant to the context, but referred to as one with which the *upameyya* is compared.
2. *Upameyya*: an object that is the subject of the context, which is compared to other object.
3. *Sādhāraṇadharmā*: the common feature between the *upamā* and *upameyya*.
4. *Upamāvācaka*: the word denoting similarity¹⁶.

The following example may lead to a greater understanding of these four points:

Mukhaṃ chandam iva kāntam

(The face is charming like the moon)

mukhaṃ - *upameyya*

chandam - *upamāna*

kāntam - *sādhāraṇadharmā*

iva - *upamāvācaka*

When all four of the above terms appear together, it is spoken of as a *pūrṇopamā* in the *Alaṅkāra* literature. Where one or two of them are absent, it is known as a *luttupamā*.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.117

¹⁶ C. Sankara Ramasastry, op.cit, p.117.

2.3 Divisions of the Similes

Similes are frequently used in Pāli literature. They are complex and rich in meaning, and have diverse usages. We can categorize these similes into various types. According to the *Kāvyādarśa*,¹⁷ there are thirty-two divisions, but in the *Subodhalaṅkāra*,¹⁸ there are only fifteen. I will explain the divisions as described in the *Subodhalaṅkāra*, though will refer to the *Kāvyādarśa* for further clarification (since the *Subodhalaṅkāra* was compiled on the basis of the *Kāvyādarśa*).

2.3.1 *Dhammopamā* - Quality Simile¹⁹.

When both the *upamā* (simile) and the *upameyya* (the object of simile) are emphasized, when they are of equal importance, that simile is called *dharmopamā*.

e.g. The Buddha's face is beautiful, just like a lotus

2.3.2 *Viparītopamā* - Reversal Simile²⁰

Here the reputed relationship of like objects is reversed. In this case, it is called a reversal simile.

e.g. The Buddha's face is similar to lotus

¹⁷ Ibid., op.cit., pp 117-155.

¹⁸ Subodhalaṅkāra,

¹⁹ *Vikāsipadumaṃ vātisundaraṃ sugatānanaṃ
iti dhammopamā nāma tulyadhamma nidassanā* Su. 186

²⁰ *Dhammahīnā mukhambhojasadisam munino iti,
jaḷo kalaṅkī ti ayam patisedhopamā siyā* Su. 193

2.3.3 *Aññamaññopamā* - Reciprocity Simile²¹

When there is no third object to which the *upamā* and *upameyya* can be compared, the simile is called an *aññamaññopamā*.

e.g. The face is just like a lotus, the lotus is just like a face.

2.3.4 *Abbhūtopamā* - Simile of Miracle²²

When the *upamāna* emphasizes something unusual, or marvelous, it is called an *abbhūtopamā*.

e.g. *Yadi kiñci bhavē ambhojaṃ locanaṃ
bhamuvibbhaṃ muninda mukhasobhaṃ samānaṃ*

If there is a lotus, which has the beautiful eyebrows of a damsel, it is compared to the Buddha's face.

2.3.5 *Silesopamā* - Simile of Pun²³.

When the similar qualities of both the *upamā* and the *upameyya* are given in the same words, that simile is called a *silesopamā*.

e.g. *Sugandhi sobhasambandhi sisiraṃsuvirodhi ca
tava mukhaṃ ambojaṃ iva*

²¹ *Tavāṇanam iv' ambhojaṃ ambhojaṃ ivate mukhaṃ
aññamaññopamā sā 'yaṃ aññamaññopamānato* Su. 188
²² *Yadi kiñci bhavē 'mbhojaṃ locanaṃ bhamuvibbhaṃ
dhāretuṃ mukhasobhaṃ taṃ taveti abbhūtopamā* Su. 189
²³ *Sugandhi sobhasambandhi sisiraṃsuvirodhi ca
mukhaṃ tav' ambhujaṃ ve ti sā silesopamā matā* Su. 190

The possession of beauty and sweet fragrance are the common qualities of the lotus and your face. Therefore your face is similar to lotus.

2.3.6 *Santānopamā* - Verbal Simile²⁴.

When the object of comparison *upameyya* is compared to some other things, which have the same verbal sound, it is called a *santānopamā*.

e.g. *sālakānana* (forest of *sāla* trees) *uyyānāya sālakānana* (the face with curled hair) *sobhinī*

2.3.7 *Nindopamā* - Simile of Censure²⁵

When the *upamā* is censured through its comparison with the *upameyya*, it is called *nindopamā*. This is to show up the superiority of the object of comparison.

e.g. Your face is similar to the moon and to a lotus, but the moon is waning and the lotus is full of pollen. Therefore, your face is more valuable than both.

2.3.8 *Paṭisedhopamā* - Simile of Negation²⁶

In this case, while showing the inability of *upamāna* to compare with the *upameyya*, the greatness of the *upameyya* is indicated. The comparison is also given indirectly.

²⁴ *Sarūpasaddavācattā sā santānopamā yathā
bālā v' uyyānamālā 'yaṃ sālakānanasobhinī* Su. 191

²⁵ *Khayī cando bahurajaṃ tehi te mukhaṃ
samānam pi samukkaṃsi ty'ayaṃ nindopamā matā* Su. 192

²⁶ *Asamatthomukhen' indu Jine te paṭigajjhitaṃ
viparītopamā tulyam ananen'ambujaṃ tava* Su. 187

e.g. The moon is quite similar to your face, but it has no power to successfully compete with your face.

2.3.9 *Sādhāraṇopamā* - Simile of Peculiarity²⁷

When the object of comparison is incomparable with anything else, it is compared with itself alone. This type of simile is called a *sādhāraṇopamā*.

e.g. Though your face is partially comparable to the moon and a lotus, it surpasses both and is comparable with itself alone.

2.3.10 *Abhūtopamā* - Simile with Something Unreal²⁸

When the object of comparison is compared to some non-existent thing, it is called an *abhūtopamā*.

e.g. When the splendor of all lotuses is put together, then your face is similar to that collection of splendor.

2.3.11 *Atthagammopamā* - Simile of That Sought to be Conveyed²⁹

The speaker simply shows that he is desirous of comparing an *upameyya* with an *upamāna*. This is called an *atthagammopamā*.

e.g. I'm willing to compare your face to the moon, whether it is correct or not.

²⁷ *Kacchaṃ candāravindānaṃ atikkamma mukhaṃ tava attano vā samaṃ jātaṃ ity' asādhāraṇopamā* Su. 194

²⁸ *Sabbambhojappabhāsāro rāsibhūto va katthaci tavānaṃ vibhāti ti hotābhūtopamā ayaṃ* Su. 195

²⁹ *Patīyate' tthagammā tu saddasāmatthiyā kvaci, samāsappaccayevādi saddayogaṃ vinā api* Su. 196

2.3.12 *Sarūpopamā* - Simile of the Truth³⁰

In this case, the comparison implies an illusion at the beginning, but it is dispelled expressively. This type of simile is called a *sarūpopamā*.

e.g. This is not a lotus, but her face. These are not bees but her eyes.

2.3.13 *Parikalpopamā* - Simile of Fancy³¹

When the simile emphasizes some quality, which does not appear in *upamāna*, the simile is called a *parikalpopamā*.

e.g. The face is unable to be compared with the moon, because it is similar even to a lotus.

2.3.14 *Samśayopamā* - Simile of Doubt³²

In this simile an object is compared to some other by expressing a doubt. It is a rhetorical method of comparison.

e.g. Is this a lotus with bees moving, or is it a face with moving eyes?

³⁰ *Bhīṅgā nemāni cakkhūni nāmbhujam mukham ev' idaṃ, Subyattasadisattena sā sarūpopamā matā* Su. 197

³¹ *May'eva mukhasobhā'ssety' alam induvikattanā, Yato 'mbhujē pi sā'tthi ti parikappopamā ayaṃ* Su. 198

³² *Kim vā 'mbujanato bhantāli kim lolanayanam mukham, mama dolāyate cittam icc' ayaṃ samśayopamā* Su. 199

2.3.15 *Paṭivattūpamā* - Simile of Parallel Idea³³

Where a certain idea is stated first, followed by a statement of an analogous idea resulting in a suggestion of likeness, it is an instance of a *paṭivattūpamā*.

e.g. There is no one among the human beings that comes into being nowadays like you. There is no second among trees to the *parijāta*.

In addition to the above divisions, the *Kāvyādarśa* lists further types, including the following:

Niyamopamā (Restrictive Simile)

Aniyamopamā (Permissive Simile)

Samuccayopamā (Simile of Cumulative Quality)

Atishayopamā (Simile of Solitary Difference)

Mohopamā (Simile of Illusion)

Nirṇayopamā (Simile of Conclusion)

Prasaṃsopamā (Simile of Praise)

Virodhopamā (Simile Rivalry)

Catūpamā (Simile of Flattery)

Bahūpamā (Simile Multifarious)

Asambhāvitopamā (Simile of Incomprehensible)

Vikkriyopamā (Simile of Transformation)

Mālopamā (Simile of a Wreath)

³³ *Kiñci vaṭṭuṃ padassetvā sadhammassābhidhānato, sāmyappatsabhāvā pativathūpamā yathā* Su. 200

2.4 Importance of Similes

In poetic writing, similes are used to enhance the beauty of expression. Without same, such writings tend to be less interesting. Therefore similes have become a necessary part of poetic writing. In the case of non-poetic writing, similes are used to introduce unfamiliar things through the medium of familiar things. When we try to understand something new, we always use our previous experience of things of a similar kind to do so. The simile also serves the same purpose. In the case of Buddhism, new and difficult teachings are explained through the use of similes. This helps the listener to understand those teachings with the help of more familiar concepts.

The use of similes is a very forceful means of conveying an idea. However, the similes employed must be relevant to the context. If a simile is familiar to a listener, he will easily understand the idea presented through that simile. The Buddha frequently uses similes in his teachings and they are always relevant to the background of the listener. If he preaches to a farmer, he uses the similes appropriate to the life of a farmer. If he preaches to a soldier, he uses the similes related to things military. For instance, when the farmer named Kasībhāradvāja questioned the Buddha as to why he did not farm, the Buddha answered using many similes related to farming:

*Saddhā bījaṃ, tapo vuṭṭhi,
paññā me yuganaṅgalaṃ
hiri īsā mano yottaṃ,
sati me phālapācanaṃ*³⁴

³⁴ Sn. 77.

(Faith is the seed, penance is the rain, wisdom is my yoke and plough, modesty is the pole, mind is the (yoke) tie, and mindfulness is my ploughshare and goad)³⁵.

The Buddha uses certain Pāli terms to denote similes. For example: *nidassanaṃ*, or pointing at, evidence, example, comparison:³⁶

*Pariyatti pamāṇaṃ” ti vatvā taṃ atthaṃ bodhisattaṃ
nidassanaṃ katvā dassetuṃ “yathā” ti-ādi vuttaṃ. Tayidaṃ
hīnaṃ nidassanaṃ katan ti daṭṭhabbaṃ.*³⁷

(After stating the texts to be the measure, *yathā* and so on is then said to demonstrate the matter to the Bodhisatta. This same demonstration to be regarded as deficient)

and *sadisam*, or similar, like, equal, apposition, attribute:³⁸

*Sadisam paṭirūpaṃ dassetvā palobhaṃ...vañcanaṃ*³⁹

(Showing a similar and suitable one with a desire is cheating).

2.5 Weaknesses in the Use of the Upamā (simile)

One should be very careful when constructing an *upamā*, because, for an *upamā* to succeed, certain conditions should be fulfilled. The *upamāna* and *upameyya* should be compatible in gender, number, and quality. These conditions are particularly important in poetic writings, incompatibility in the above conditions being spoken of as a

³⁵ K.R. Norman, The Group of Discourses, (Oxford: PTS, 1992), p. 9.

³⁶ Rhys Davids, Pāli-English Dictionary, p. 358.

³⁷ Sv.III.105.

³⁸ Rhys Davids, Pāli-English Dictionary, p. 674.

³⁹ Dīghanikāyaṭṭhakathāṭikā Mahāgosinhasuttavaṇṇanā

weakness in the use of the *upamā*.⁴⁰ According to the *Kāvayādarśa*, there are seven such weaknesses:

1. *Hīnatā* - Deficiency of Upamāna
2. *Asaṃbhava* – Improbability
3. *Liṅgabhedā* – Difference in Gender
4. *Vacanabheda* – Difference in Number
5. *Viparyaya* – Impropriety of Comparison
6. *Upamānidhikyam* - Surplus Age in Upamāna
7. *Asādrusyam* - Dissimilarity of Upamāna

None of these weaknesses is mentioned in the *Subodhālankāra*, but they are explicitly mentioned in the *Kāvyaadarshaya*.

For instance, if someone says “The moon is like swan”, the genders are not compatible, since the *upamāna* and *upameyya* have two different genders. When such defects are present, the similes cannot convey their idea correctly. When we say “The sky is as pure as the ponds”, there is incomparability of number. The sky is singular and cannot be compared to several ponds. The correct way is to say “The sky is as pure as a pure pond”. In this case, the *upamāna* and *upameyya* are compatible in number.

2.6 The Relationship between Similes and the Dhamma

The Buddha often explained the Dhamma with the help of similes. For example:

⁴⁰ *Samubbajeti dhīmatam - bhinnaliṅgādikā tu yā,
upamādūsanālāya – m’ etaṃ katthaci tam tathā?* Su. 205.

*Kullūpamaṃ vo bhikkhave Dhammaṃ desissāmi*⁴¹

(Bhikkhus, I shall teach you how the Dhamma is similar to a raft)⁴².

The wrong grasp of Dhamma is compared to grasping a snake.⁴³ The frequent use of similes was one of the teaching methods the Buddha used to explain the Dhamma. The reason for the frequent use of similes is that straightforward language is not always capable of explaining the Dhamma. The Dhamma is so deep in meaning that straightforward language cannot fully express that meaning. The Buddha therefore used many indirect linguistic modes to convey his teaching. Similes are one of the best devices in those modes. Similes have therefore played an important role in illustrating difficult aspects of the Dhamma. In some cases, it is completely impossible to explain the deep meaning of the Dhamma without the aid of similes. For instance, only similes are able to explain the concept of arahantship.

“What do you think, Vaccha? Suppose a fire were burning before you. Would you know: ‘This fire is burning before me?’ ”

“I would, Master Gotama”.

“If some were to ask you, Vaccha: ‘What does this fire burning before you burn in dependence on?’. Being asked thus, what would you answer?”

“Being asked thus, Master Gotama, I would answer: ‘This fire burning before me burns in dependence on grass and sticks’ ”.

⁴¹ MN.I. 135.

⁴² Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit, p. 228.

“If that fire before you were to be extinguished, would you know: ‘This fire before me has been extinguished?’ ”⁴⁴

The word *nibbuta*, which was originally used for fire, is employed here to denote the state of the arahant. It is only through such kinds of similes that the state of the arahant can be clearly presented.

The Buddha was aware of the misuse of language. The manner in which unsuitable terminology creates confusion is explained clearly in the *Niruttipattha Sutta*.

Tayo ’me, bhikkhave, niruttipathā adhivacanapathā paññattipathā asaṅkiṇṇā asaṅkiṇṇapubbā, na saṅkiyanti, na saṅkiyissanti, appaṭikuṭṭhā samaṇehi brāhmaṇehi viññūhi. Katame tayo? Yaṃ, bhikkhave, rūpaṃ atītaṃ niruddhaṃ vipariṇataṃ ’ahosī’ ti tassa saṅkhā, ’ahosī’ ti tassa samaññā, ’ahosī’ ti tassa paññatti; na tassa saṅkhā ’atthī’ ti, na tassa saṅkhā ’bhavissatī’⁴⁵.

(These three modes of reckoning, brethren, of terming, of naming, both now and formerly held distinct, will not be confused by recluses and Brahmins who are wise; which three?

⁴³ MN. I.134.

⁴⁴ Sace pana taṃ, Vaccha, evaṃ puccheyya yo te ayaṃ purato aggī jalatī ayaṃ aggī kiṃ paṭicca jalatī ti, evaṃ puṭṭho tvaṃ, Vaccha, kin ti byākareyyāsī ti? Sace maṃ, bho Gotama, yo...evaṃ puṭṭho ahaṃ, bho Gotama, evaṃ byākareyyaṃ yo me ayaṃ purato aggī jalatī ayaṃ aggī tiṇakatṭhupādānaṃ paṭicca jalatī ti. Sace te, Vaccha, purato so aggī nibbāyeyya, jāneyyāsī tvaṃ ayaṃ me purato aggī nibbuto ti? Sace me, bho Gotama, purato so aggī nibbāyeyya, jāneyyāhaṃ ayaṃ me purato aggī nibbuto ti. Yo te ayaṃ purato aggī nibbuto so aggī ito katamaṃ disaṃ gato puratthimaṃ vā dakkhiṇaṃ vā pacchimaṃ vā uttaraṃ vā ti, evaṃ puṭṭho tvaṃ, Vaccha, kin ti byākareyyāsī ti? Na upeti, bho Gotama, yaṇ hi so, bho Gotama, aggī tiṇakatṭhupādānaṃ paṭicca ajali tassa ca pariyādānā aññassa ca anupahārā so nibbuto tv’ eva saṅkhyāṃ gacchatī ti. MN. I. 488 tr, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit, p. 593.

⁴⁵ SN. III. 71.

Whatsoever of matter, brethren, is past, ceased, changed, that is reckoned, termed and named as “has been”. It is not reckoned as “is” nor it is reckoned as “will be”⁴⁶).

David J. Kalupahana argues that the Buddha was innovative in using language to introduce his teaching. The language and the concepts available at the time of the Buddha were sometimes not suitable to present Buddhist ideas clearly. Therefore the Buddha, according to Kalupahana, discovered a new use of language, which is non-substantial in nature.⁴⁷

The method of analysis as a means of clarifying the meanings of concepts was frequently used by the Buddha. The analysis revealed the absence of any essential or substantial meaning. The absence of any such meaning did not mean that they are meaningless. The Buddha’s theory of ‘non-substantiality’ (*anattā*) does not involve nothingness. While continuing to defuse solidified concepts, the Buddha reintroduced the linguistic elements that allowed for flexibility.⁴⁸

Similes are one of the linguistic devices used by the Buddha to fulfill the above purpose. Similes are particularly useful to avoid the possibility of language implying more substantiality than is warranted. Similes are able to clarify the matter without involving any absolute notions. Kalupahana comments:

⁴⁶ F.L.Woodward, tr, *The Kindred Sayings*, (Oxford: PTS, 1995) pp. 62-63.

⁴⁷ David J. Kalupahana, *The Buddha’s Philosophy of Language*, (Colombo, Sarvodaya Vishvalekha Publication, 1999), pp. i-iv.

Thus the Buddha can be credited with a revolution in linguistic philosophy when he consistently utilized the ‘language of becoming’ to take the venom off the ‘language of existence.’⁴⁹

In this new use of language, similes are very important. Being a forceful mode of expression, similes are able to present the Buddha’s ideas conveniently to his listeners. Similes help people avoid falling into the twin extremes of permanent existence and nihilistic non-existence.

2.7 Conclusion

In the above discussion, we have seen that similes are characterized by:

1. Their beauty of expression
2. Their ready ability to convey meaningfulness.

In poetic writings, the use of similes was a necessary feature. The beauty of poetic writings depends on the use of similes. Similes often provide a beautiful means of conveying the Buddha’s teachings.

In the Buddha’s linguistic revolution, similes proved very helpful in presenting his ideas in a new light. With the help of such similes, the Buddha was able to conveniently communicate his discovery to the audience of his day. In this sense, similes have played a very important role in spreading the Dhamma. Similes can be a useful tool in reaching different kinds of people from all walks of life.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.ii.

Chapter 3

Similes in the Pāli Nikāyas

3.1 Classification of similes according to their content

Similes in the Pāli Nikāyas can be classified into three categories, according to their content, as follows:

1. Those that reflect the social life of the ancient Indian people
2. Those that are endowed with a humorous character
3. Those that are based on observation of nature.

3.1.1 Similes that reflect the social life of the ancient Indian people.

As mentioned earlier, similes in the Pāli Nikāyas present a complete picture of the social life of the Indian people of the day. From these similes, we can observe the daily life of people from the different social classes, such as workers, physicians, priests, and kings, and so on. For instance, the *Devadaha Sutta*⁴⁹ gives the simile of a man wounded by a poisoned arrow. This simile relates the whole process of healing. The simile of the elephant-tamer (*nāganāviko*) in the *Dantabhūmi Sutta*⁵¹ describes the entire process of taming elephants. In the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta*⁵², the entire work of the goldsmith is described through the simile of a skilled goldsmith (*dakkho suvaṇṇakārako*). In the Dhammapada, there are many similes, which highlight the workers' lives, and so forth.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.iii.

⁵⁰ *Puriso sallena viddho assa savāsenā*, MN.II. 216.

⁵¹ MN.III.133-134.

⁵² MN.III. 244.

The *Paṇḍitavagga* includes references to traders, who sell flowers, just as other verses elsewhere cite different kinds of livelihood⁵³, such as:

Engineers (who build canals and aqueducts) lead the water (to wherever they like), fletchers make the arrow straight, carpenters carve the wood; wise people fashion (discipline) themselves.

The similes in the *Gopālaka*⁵⁴ and *Uposatha*⁵⁵ Suttas focus on the lives of herdsmen. Such types of simile thus depict the daily life of the ancient Indian people.

3.1.2 Similes that are endowed with a humorous character.

The second category evinces a sense of humour when it shows the ignorance of some ascetics and Brahmans who are involved in metaphysical speculations. The simile of the blind men and the elephant is very popular.⁵⁶ The Buddha compared a group of ascetics and Brahmins who quarreled about the truth to a group of men blind from birth who imagined an elephant to accord with their own several tangible perception of same. To point out the nonsense of Brahmans' claim, the Buddha delivered the seriously humorous similes in the *Tevijja Sutta*⁵⁷. They are like string of blind men clinging to one another (*andaveṇi paramparā samattā*), a man who desires to get the most beautiful girl in the country :

⁵³ *Udakaṃhi nayanti nettikā-usukārā namyanti tejanam dāruṃ namyanti tacchakā- attānaṃ damayanti paṇḍitā*, Dh. 80.

⁵⁴ AN.IV. 347.

⁵⁵ AN.I. 211.

⁵⁶ *Jaccandhā...hatthiṃ dassesi*, Ud. 68.

⁵⁷ DN. 238-244.

*Puriso evaṃ vadeyya: “Ahaṃ yā imasmiṃ janapade janapada
kalyāṇi taṃ icchāmi, taṃ kāmemi ti”;*

or a man who wants to construct a staircase of a palace at a crossroads:

Puriso cātummahāpathe nissenim kareyya pāsādass ārohaṇāya.

3.1.3 Similes that are based on observation of nature

The third category includes the largest number of similes scattered throughout the Pāli Nikāyas, especially in the Dhammapada, the Theragāthā and the Therīgāthā. Based upon natural surroundings, those similes depict beautiful and pleasant-looking hills, mountains, rivers, trees, rain showers, burning fire, flowers, bees, birds, the moon shining in the sky, and so on.⁵⁸

The Dhammapada compares a devoted monk to the moon shining in the sky:

*Yo have daharo bhikkhu
yuñjati buddhasāsane
so imaṃ lokam pabhāseti
abbhā mutto ’va candimā’⁵⁹*

(The mendicant who, though young, applies himself to the doctrine of the Buddha, he illuminates this world like the moon when free a cloud)⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Sanghasena Singh, *Similes and Metaphors in the Dhammapada*, The Nava Nalanda Mahavihara Research publication, Vol IV, (Nalanda: Nava Mahavihara, 1979), p.7.

⁵⁹ Dh. 382.

⁶⁰ S. Radhakrishnan, tr, *The Dhammapada*, (Madras, Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 176.

In the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, a person who loses his fair repute because of desire, hatred, fear and folly is compared to the moon at the time of its waning.⁶¹ In the same Sutta, the one who overcomes these four and grows in goodness and repute is compared to the moon at the time of its waxing.⁶²

The Theragāthā depicts a monk who has controlled his senses like a lion :

*Anuddhato acapalo nipako samvutindriyo
sobhati paṃsakūlena sīho va girigabbhare*⁶³

(One who is not conceited, not vain, zealous, with faculties restrained, does appear impressive because of his rag from a dust-heap, like a lion in a mountain cave)⁶⁴

In the Dhammapada, the person who has a stable mind is compared to a solid rock:

*Selo yathā ekaghano
vātena na samīrati
evaṃ nindāpasamsāsu
na samijjhanti panditā*⁶⁵

(As a solid rock is not shaken by the wind, so wise men are not moved amidst blame and praise)⁶⁶

⁶¹ “Desire and hatred, fear and folly, he who breaks the law through these loses all his fair repute like the moon at waning time”, Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Kandy, BPS, 1995), p.462.

⁶² Ibid, “Desire and hatred, fear and folly, he who never yields to these grows in goodness and repute like the moon at waxing time”.

⁶³ Th 1081.

⁶⁴ K.R.Norman, tr. *Elders’ Verses I*, (London: PTS,1969), p. 99.

⁶⁵ Dh. 81.

⁶⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, op. cit. p. 85.

3.2 The Remarkable Features of the Simile

These three categories of similes serve as an effective means of conveying their meaning. Such similes are endowed with remarkable features, which can be identified as spontaneity, simplicity and aptness.

3.2.1 The Feature of Spontaneity

It is apparent that similes were, in most cases, applied spontaneously. Without any effort, users can apply certain specified similes to particular situations. On one occasion, the Buddha was asked about the nature of his teaching, in which he appears to teach to some people in more detail than to others. The Buddha answers, giving the simile of the three sorts of field (*tīni khetāni*):

Just as a farmer who sows seed according to quality of the field, such that he first sows the excellent field, then the moderate, and finally the bad field, so does the Buddha preach his teaching first to monks and nuns, then to the lay followers and finally to other heretics⁶⁷

Explaining his method of ploughing to the Brāhmin Kasībhāradvāja, the Buddha says:

*Saddhā bījaṃ, tapo vuṭṭhī
paññā me yuganaṅgaṃ
hiri īsā, mano yottaṃ
sati me phālapācanaṃ*⁶⁸

⁶⁷ SN.IV.315.

⁶⁸ Sn 77.

(Faith is the seed, penance is the rain, wisdom is my yoke and plough; modesty is the pole, mind is the (yoke-)tie, mindfulness is my ploughshare and goad)⁶⁹.

Here the Buddha proves himself to be a spiritual farmer, his equipment being *saddhā*, *tapo*, *paññā*, and *hiri*.

The Buddha explained his teaching by using similes lacking tension. Those similes were supposed to explain the meaning as he wished to express.

3.2.2 The Feature of Simplicity

The most striking feature of similes is their simplicity. Similes are often built up by way of familiar facts and figures of everyday life. Neither abstract nor complicated, they allow large numbers to perceive the simple pictures conveyed by them. Regarding this feature, the Venerable Nārada observes:

Readers will note the simplicity of the similes employed by the Buddha, which are intelligible even to a child. Take, for instance, the similes of the wheels of the cart, the man's shadow, the ill-thatched house, the sleeping village, the clear deep lake, the sweet-smelling beautiful flower, the bee extracting honey, etc. The wisdom of the Buddha lies in his exposition of profound truths in such plain terms.⁷⁰

The following are very simple, but attractive, examples of similes:

⁶⁹ K.R. Norman, tr; *The Group of Discourses* (Sutta Nipāta), Oxford, PTS, 1992), p. 9.

⁷⁰ Nārada Thera, *The Dhammapada*, (Saigon: Thu Lam An Thu Quan, 1963), Preface, p

*Vāto rukkham va dubbalam*⁷¹

(As the wind throws down a tree of little strength)⁷².

*Vāto selam va pabbatam*⁷³

(As the wind does not throw a rocky mountain)⁷⁴

Yathā agāram ducchannam

*Vuṭṭi samativijjhati*⁷⁵

(As rains breaks through an ill-thatched house)⁷⁶

*Ujūṃkaroti medhāvī - usukāro 'va tejanam*⁷⁷

(Just as a fletcher makes straight his arrow, the wise man makes straight his trembling)⁷⁸.

*Vārijo 'va thale khitto – okamokata ubbhato*⁷⁹

(Even as a fish, taken from his watery home and thrown on the dry ground)⁸⁰, etc.

3.2.3 The Feature of Aptness

Although these similes are very natural, simple and based on ordinary observation, they are very effective and convincing.⁸¹ Similes

⁷¹ Dhp.7.

⁷² S.Radhakrishnan, tr. *The Dhammapada*, (Calcutta, Oxford University Press,1950), p.60.

⁷³ Dhp. 8.

⁷⁴ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit, p. 60.

⁷⁵ Dhp.13.

⁷⁶ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit, p. 62.

⁷⁷ Dhp. 33.

⁷⁸ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit.p.70.

⁷⁹ Dhp. 34.

⁸⁰ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.70.

⁸¹ Sudharma Pandita, "The Role of similes in the Pali Nikāyas", in *Buddhist Philosophy and Culture*, (Sri Lanka: N.A.Jayawikrama Felicitation Volume Committee, 1987), p. 280.

conduce to great efficacy because they are used in a very attractive and suitable manner. In other words, similes are remarkable due to their feature of aptness. They vary from one occasion to another to suit the audience concerned. The aptness or situational appropriateness of similes enables one to understand even the most difficult concept in the Buddha's teaching. For instance, the Buddha utilizes the simile of the extinguished fire to reject all kinds of metaphysical assumptions pertaining to the mind of liberated bhikkhu.⁸²

The simile of the oil lamp (*telappadīpo*) is another example of the aptness of similes. This simile has been used to show how craving grows and ceases:

Suppose. bhikkhus, an oil lamp was burning in dependence on oil and a wick, and a person would pour oil into it and adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, sustained by oil, fuelled by it, that oil lamp would burn for a long time. So too, when one lives contemplating things that can fetter, craving increases'⁸³.

In the same way, the flame of the lamp that has been blown out signifies the cessation of craving.

Indeed, these three remarkable features make the simile become one of the most distinctive figures of speech. In particular, the features of spontaneity, simplicity and aptness can be observed in the third category: similes based on observation of nature.

⁸² *So aggi nibbayeyya*, MN.I. 487-489.

⁸³ Bhikkhu Bodhi, tr, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, (Boston, Wisdom Publication, 2000), p.590.

3.3. Similes based upon observation of nature vividly reflect these three remarkable features.

It is interesting to examine the category of similes based upon observation of nature. Since this category of similes depicts natural life, it embodies in itself these three remarkable features. In his article “Analogies”⁸⁴, H.G.A. van Zeyst gives a detailed description of this category, dealing with the character of animals and natural surroundings.

3.3.1 Similes dealing with the character of animals.

Similes depicting animal life illustrate the contact between men and the animal world of at the time. Those who used these similes had very keen eyes, and a sensitive mind, when observing the behaviour of animals. Based on these facts, similes are built up to make a suitable comparison. Furthermore, they really provide us with a sense of humour when they exhibit animals’ characters to be very close to human nature.

Multifarious animals are depicted in the similes. We find domestic animals, such as cows, calves and bulls, goats and rams, horses and donkeys, dogs, cats, rats, and various kinds of birds, and so on. Insects are also mentioned. Then there are wild animals, like elephants, lions, jackals, deer, and monkeys, and so forth. These similes also cite many things that are closely connected with such animals: pastures, milk, butter and honey, a cowherd, a hunter with his bow and arrow, a knife, the bait, the fish-hook and the snare.

Cows (*go*, *gāvī*) have long been sacred animals in India. People there respect them and worship them, and think:

*Annadā baladā c' etā vaṇṇadā sukhadā tathā
etam atthavasam ñatvā nāssu gāvo hanimsu te*⁸⁵

("They give food, strength, (good) complexion and likewise happiness". Knowing this reason, *they* did not kill cows)⁸⁶.

The responsible monk is compared to a cow with a young calf. Even though he engages in meditative practice, he always considers the benefit of his fellow monks:

"Just as a cow with a young calf, even while she is pulling grass, yet keeps an eye on her calf"⁸⁷.

One who is endowed with virtue and wisdom will be respected by all, irrespective of his race, clan or origin:

"Just as a mighty bull, swift and tamed, will be prominent among the herd, whether his colour is uniform or dappled, white, black or red"⁸⁸.

Then, again, the life span of a man is so limited that it is compared to a doomed cow that is going to be slaughtered:

"Just as a cow, about to be slaughtered, being led to the shambles, each time she raises her foot moves nearer to

⁸⁴ See *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol I, ed G.P. Malalasekara, Government Press, 1965.

⁸⁵ Sn. 297.

⁸⁶ K.R.Norman, op.cit., p.33.

⁸⁷ *Seyyathā pi bhikkhave gāvī taruṇavacchaṃ thambañ ca ālumpati vacchakañ ca apaviṇāti*, MN.I. 324.

⁸⁸ AN.I.162.

destruction, nearer to death, even so Brahman, like a doomed cow is the life of man".⁸⁹

Closely associated with the cow and the herd is the cowherd (*gopāla*). The cowherd who does not own the herd, but merely counts another's cows, is likened to the person who can recite the scriptures, but cannot practise accordingly:

*Bahum pi ce sahitam bhāsamāno,
natakkaro hoti naro pamatto
gopo va gāvo gaṇayam paresam
na bhāgavā sāmāññassa hoti*⁹⁰

(Even if he recites a large number of scriptural texts but, being slothful, does not act accordingly, he is like a cowherd counting the cows of others, he has no share in religious life)⁹¹

The cowherd's daily work is used to point out the miseries of existence:

*Yathā daṇḍena gopālo
gāvo pājeti gocaram
evam jarā ca maccū ca āyūṃ pāceti pāṇinam*⁹²

(Just as cowherd with his staff drives the cows into the pasture-ground, so old age and death drive the life of sentient beings (into a new existence))⁹³.

⁸⁹ *Seyyathāpi brahmaṇa gāvī āghātanam*, AN.IV.138.

⁹⁰ Dhp.19.

⁹¹ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.64.

⁹² Dhp.135.

⁹³ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.104.

The bull (*āsabha*) is valued for its strength. Thus the Buddha is frequently described as the lordly bull among men:

*So sabbasattuttamo aggapuggalo
narāsabho sabbapajānaṃ uttamo
vattessati cakkamaṃ isivahaye vane
nadaṃ va sīho balavā migābhibhū*⁹⁴.

(He is the best of all beings, the pre-eminent individual, bull among men, supreme among all people. Roaring like a lion, possessing strength, overlord of animals, he will cause the wheel to turn in the grove named after seers)⁹⁵.

The ascetic Asita describes the prince Gotama as the lord of stars:

*Tārāsabhaṃ va nabhasigamaṃ visuddhiyaṃ*⁹⁶
(Purified like the lord of stars going in the sky)⁹⁷.

The Buddha spoke of his emancipation:

*Usabho-r-iva chetvā bandhanāni iti bhagavā*⁹⁸
(“Having broken my bonds like a bull”, said the Blessed One)⁹⁹.

His disciples who had reached the perfection of arahantship have got safely across to the further shore by overcoming Māra’s stream.

⁹⁴ Sn. 684

⁹⁵ K.R. Norman, op.cit, p. 78.

⁹⁶ Sn. 687

⁹⁷ K.R.Norman, op.cit., p. 79.

⁹⁸ Sn. 29

These holy ones are like those bulls, which are the leaders of the herd, guiding the herd across the stream.¹⁰⁰ The simile of the bull of the herd often illustrates the importance of leadership:

*Gavaṃ ce taramānānaṃ,
jimhaṃ gacchati puṅgavo;
sabbā tā jimhaṃ gacchanti,
nette jimhaṃ gate sati.
Gavaṃ ce taramānānaṃ,
ujuṃ gacchati puṅgavo;
sabbā gāvī ujuṃ yanti,
nette ujuṃ gate sati*¹⁰¹

(The bull through floods a devious course will take.
The herd of kine all straggles in his wake.
So if a leader a tortuous path pursue,
the bas ends will he guide his vulgar crew,
and the whole realm an age of license rue.
But the the bull a course direct should steer,
the herd of kine straight follows in his rear.)¹⁰²

Thus, the destiny of the herd depends on the guidance of its leader; similarly, a king's skill, or lack thereof, impacts his subjects totally.

And the Ven Sāriputta avails himself of the following simile to state his harmless attitude:

⁹⁹ K.R.Norman, op.cit, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Usabhā gopitaro gopiṇāyako*, MN.I. 222.

¹⁰¹ Jā III.111.

¹⁰² E.B.Cowell, tr., *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha*, Vols. III-IV, (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1991), p. 74.

Just as a bull with cut horns, mild, well trained, roaming from street to street, from cross-road, harms nothing with its feet or horns, even so I abide with heart large, abundant, measureless, feeling no hatred, nor ill-will.¹⁰³

Just as two oxen yoked to the plough are bound by the yoke-tie, so the faculties of sense and the corresponding objects are linked together by desire.¹⁰⁴ The ox is often used as an example of the growth of body, but not of wisdom. Thus the man with little learning grows old like an ox.¹⁰⁵ The horse (*assa*) cited in similes is always a well-trained horse, or thoroughbred (*ājañña*). Like a well-trained horse abounding in good qualities, a good man cultivates his mind:

Asso yathā bhadro kasāniviṭṭho
*ātāpino saṃvegiṇo bhavātha*¹⁰⁶

(Like a well-trained horse when touched by a whip, be strenuous and swift and you will...)¹⁰⁷

Leaving behind those who are indolent, the wise man advances first:

¹⁰³ AN.IV 367. *Seyyathāpi usabho chinnavisāno.*

¹⁰⁴ *Chandarāga*, SN.IV.163.

¹⁰⁵ *Appassutāyaṃ puriso, balivaddo'va jirati*
maṃsāni tassa vaḍḍhanti, pañña tassa na vaḍḍhati, Dhṛp. 152.

¹⁰⁶ Dhṛp.144.

¹⁰⁷ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.107.

*Appamatto pamattesu
sutteso bahujāgaro
Abalassam 'va sīghasso
hitvā yāti sumedhaso*¹⁰⁸

(The wise man advances even as a racehorse does, leaving behind the hack).¹⁰⁹

A well-trained thoroughbred that is worthy of a king possesses the virtues of uprightness (*ajjava*), swiftness (*java*), patience (*khanti*), and docility (*soracca*); and the same four virtues are to be found in a monk who is worthy of gifts and offerings.¹¹⁰ Sometimes the virtue of gentleness (*maddava*) is added.¹¹¹

In the Theragāthā, the thoroughbred is frequently compared with the mind under training. Describing his effort at mental culture, the Ven Vijitasena states:

*Yathā varahadamayakusalo
sārathi pavaro dameti ājaññaṃ
evaṃ damayissan taṃ
paṭiṭṭhito pañcasu balesu*¹¹²

(As the excellent charioteer, skilled in the taming of an excellent horse, tames a thoroughbred, so shall I, standing firm in five powers, tame you)¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Dh.p. 29.

¹⁰⁹ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.68.

¹¹⁰ AN.I.113.

¹¹¹ AN.III. 248.

¹¹² Th. 358.

Indra and Brahmā pay homage to Sunīta, the Arahant:

Namo te purisājaññā
namo te purisuttama
yasssa te āsavā khīṇā
*dakkhiṇeyyo 'si mārisa*¹¹⁴

(Homage to you, thoroughbred of men, homage to you, the best of men, to you whose āsavas are annihilated; you are worthy of gifts, sir)¹¹⁵.

For: “Even the gods envy the saints, whose senses obey them like a well-trained horse”.¹¹⁶ The simile of the charioteer is very popular.

One of the well-known epithets of the Buddha is *anuttaro purisadammasārathi*, i.e., the supreme trainer of trainable men.

The donkey’s inherent foolishness is another befitting simile used by the teacher. A donkey follows closely behind a herd of cattle¹¹⁷ thinking:

“I am a cow, too”; likewise a monk who joins the order of monks, but does not work hard for the higher trainings. Māra, the evil one, observed this characteristic and persuaded some Brahmanas and householders to scold and harass the monks: “These shavelings meditate with their shoulders drooping, with

¹¹³ K.R.Norman, op.cit.p.39.

¹¹⁴ Th. 629.

¹¹⁵ K.R.Norman, op.cit., p.62.

¹¹⁶ *Asso yathā sārathinā sudantā*, Dh. 94

¹¹⁷ *Seyyathā gadrabho gogaṇaṃ piṭṭhito*, AN.I.229.

their faces cast down as if drugged, just as a donkey mediates on the edge of a refuse-heap when its burden is removed".¹¹⁸

The dog (*sunakha*) is treated as a pet and a man's best friend.

Yet, as a chain binds a dog, so are human beings tied by sensual pleasures. The bhikkhunī Sumedhā observes:

*Kāmaṃ kāmesu damassu tāva
sunakho 'va saṅkhalābaddho*¹¹⁹

(Let not yourself be bound by your own sense-desires as dog is bound by chain)¹²⁰

The attitude of carelessness is compared to the enmity between cat and mouse. Just as a cat pounces on a mouse and swallows it, or the mouse gnaws the stomach of the cat which then experiences great pain and death, so will those monks who lack mindfulness, and who spend too much of their time in the village, lose their religious life.¹²¹

The elephant is allegorically used by the *theras* to describe their struggle for emancipation. The Ven. Abhibhūtatthera is said to have shaken off the armies of the King of Death:

*Dunātha maccuno senaṃ
nalāgāraṃ 'va kuñjaro*"¹²²

(Knock down the army of death as an elephant knocks down a reed-hut)¹²³

¹¹⁸ *Seyyathāpi gadrabho vahaccchinno sandhisamalasaṅkatīre*, MN.I. 334

¹¹⁹ Thī. 509.

¹²⁰ K.R.Norman, op.cit., p.50.

¹²¹ SN.II.270.

¹²² Th. 256.

The Ven. Tālapuṭṭatthera says:

*Viriyena taṃ mayha vasānayissam
gajo ' va mattam kusalam kusaggaho*¹²⁴

(I shall bring you under my control by my energy, as a skilled hook-holder an elephant in rut)¹²⁵;

and:

*Ārammaṇe taṃ balasā nibandhisam
nāgam va thamabhamhi dalhāya rajjuyā*¹²⁶

(I shall bind you (mind) to the meditation-base by force, as one binds an elephant to a post with firm rope).

The taming of an elephant by means of a rope, post and hook provides an illustration of the control of thought and mind:

*Yathā kuñjaro adantaṃ
navagahaṃ aṅkusaggaho
balavā āvaṭṭeti akāmaṃ
evaṃ āvattayissam taṃ*¹²⁷

(Even as one who firmly wields the hook makes the untamed elephant turn against its will, so I will turn you back)¹²⁸

¹²³ K.R.Norman, op.cit.p.30.

¹²⁴ Th.1139.

¹²⁵ K.R.Norman, op.cit, p.104.

¹²⁶ Th. 1141.

¹²⁷ Th. 357.

¹²⁸ K.R.Norman, op.cit, p.104.

But the tamed elephant is very useful in work and battle:

*Kadā nu nāgo 'va saṃgāmacārī
padālaye kāmaguṇesu chandaṃ*¹²⁹

(O when, like the elephant in battle charging, shall I break through desire for joys of sense?)¹³⁰

However, even elephants are frightened by the lion's roar. When hearing the voice of the king of beasts, they break leather bonds and run here and there with much fear.¹³¹ Just as the lion's roar causes fear in other animals, so does the triumphant voice of the Teacher show the fleeting nature of things. Then even devas realize the temporary nature of their lifespan.

A lion figurative expresses the magnificence of the Buddha:

*Sīho 'si anupādāno pahīnabhayabheravo*¹³²

(Without grasping, you have eliminated fear and dread, like a lion)

The Buddha, when resting, adopts the lion's posture:

*Santāritvāna saṃghātiṃ
seyyaṃ kappesi Gotamo
sīho selaguhāyāyaṃ va
pahīnabhayabheravo*¹³³

¹²⁹ Th.1105.

¹³⁰ K.R.Norman, op.cit,p.39.

¹³¹ SN.III. 85

¹³² Sn. 546.

¹³³ Th. 367.

(Spreading his other robe, Gotama made his bed, like a lion in a rocky cave, with fear and terror eliminated)¹³⁴

His teaching is compared to the lion's roar:

Nadanti evaṃ sappaññā

*sihā va girigabbhare*¹³⁵

(Thus, the wise roars like lions in a mountain cave);

and:

*Sallakato mahāvīro - sīho va nadatī vane*¹³⁶

(The dart-remover; the great hero, roars like a lion in a wood)¹³⁷

Roaring like a lion, the Teacher sets in motion the Wheel of the Dhamma.¹³⁸ Careful hunting of its prey is a characteristic of the lion. In the same manner, the Buddha teaches the Dhamma with care and thoroughness (*sakkacaṃ*), because “The Tathāgata, monks, filled with respect for the Dhamma, is filled with reverence for the Dhamma”.¹³⁹

The ill-minded person, Sārabha, tried to imitate the Buddha. He tried to utter a lion's roar by speaking the truth, but just gave a jackal's scream.¹⁴⁰ The wise man enjoys freedom like a deer in the forest:

¹³⁴ K.R.Norman, op.cit., p.40.

¹³⁵ Th. 177

¹³⁶ Th. 832.

¹³⁷ K.R.Norman, op.cit. p. 23.

¹³⁸ K.R.Norman, op.cit, p.79.

¹³⁹ *Dhammagaru bhikkhave tathāgato dhammagāravo*, AN.III.121.

¹⁴⁰ *Jarasigāla*, AN.I.187

*Migo araṇṇamhi yathā abaddho
 yen icchakaṃ gacchati gocarāya
 viññū naro seritaṃ pekkhamāno
 eko care khaggavisāṇakappo*¹⁴¹

(As a deer which is not tied up goes wherever it wishes in the forest for pasture, an understanding man, having regard for his independence, should wander solitary as a rhinoceros horn)¹⁴².

They enter the delightful mountain and rejoice there with the feeling of solitariness:

*Migo yathā seri sucittakānane
 giriṃ pāvisi abbhamāliniṃ
 anākule tattha nage ramissasi
 asaṃsayam citta parābhavissasi*¹⁴³

(Like the deer roaming at will in the variegated grove, having entered the delightful mountain, wreathed in clouds, I shall rejoice there on the uncrowded mountain; you, mind, will certainly perish)¹⁴⁴

The restless mind is also spoken of as the monkey-mind.¹⁴⁵ This distracted mind is like a monkey jumping from branch to branch,¹⁴⁶ or like an ape going around a little house with five doors:

¹⁴¹ Sn.39.

¹⁴² K.R.Norman, op.cit, p. 7.

¹⁴³ Th.1144.

¹⁴⁴ K.R.Norman, op.cit, p.105.

¹⁴⁵ *Kapicitta*, Jā.III.148.

Makkaṭo pañcadvārāyaṃ

kuṭikāyaṃ pasakkiya

dvārena anupariyeti

*ghaṭṭayanto muhum muhum*¹⁴⁷

(A monkey, having approached the small five-doored hut, goes round and round from door to door, knocking again and again)¹⁴⁸

The restless state of mind is illustrated as follows:

Just as monkey, faring through the woods, catches hold of a bough and, upon letting it go, catches another, even so does that which we call thought, mind, consciousness, arise as one thing, cease as another, both by day and by night”¹⁴⁹.

The monkey who is trapped completely in a snare symbolises a heedless monk who does not control his five physical senses. Gradually, he will fall into Māra’s trap.¹⁵⁰

Owing to negligence, men are caught like fish in the opening of a funnel-net,¹⁵¹ or like fish in shallow water:

Mamāyite passatha phandamāne

macce va appodake khīṇasote

tam pi disvā amamo careyya

*bhavesu āsatthiṃ akuppamāno*¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ *Kapiīva sākhaṃ pamuñcaṃ gahāya*, Sn. 791.

¹⁴⁷ Th.125

¹⁴⁸ K.R.Norman, op.cit. p.17.

¹⁴⁹ SN.II. 95

¹⁵⁰ SN.II.148

¹⁵¹ *Macchā ’va kumināmukhe*, Ud.76.

¹⁵² Sn. 777.

(See them floundering in respect of their cherished possessions, like fish (floundering) in a dried-up stream, which has little water. Seeing this too, one should live without selfishness, not forming attachment to existences)¹⁵³

The simile of a fish swallowing the hook warns us of the danger in sensual pleasures:

*Mā appakassa hetu
kāsasukhassa vipulaṃ jahi sukhaṃ
mā puthulomova baḷisaṃ
gīlitvā paccā vihaññasi*¹⁵⁴

(Do not abandon extensive happiness for the sake of a little happiness from sensual pleasure; do not suffer afterwards, like the puthuloma fish having swallowed the hook)¹⁵⁵

The flesh-baited hook provides a simile for gains, favours and flattery: *Balisanti kho bhikkhave lābhasakkārasilokass' etaṃ adhivacanam*¹⁵⁶ (Monks, hook—this is a synonym for gains, favours and flattery). But the net or snare (*jāla*) is used to illustrate the trap of wrong views. There are sixty-two wrong views caught in Buddha's net.¹⁵⁷ The snare is also likened to death¹⁵⁸, and the repeated round of existence¹⁵⁹, by which people are trapped in the snares of lust.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ K.R. Norman, op.cit. p. 91.

¹⁵⁴ Thī. 508.

¹⁵⁵ K.R. Norman, op.cit., p. 51.

¹⁵⁶ Sn.II. 226.

¹⁵⁷ *Brahmajālasutta*, DN.I. 12-46.

¹⁵⁸ *Maccuap āsa*, Th. 463.

¹⁵⁹ *Oghapāsa*, Th. 680.

¹⁶⁰ *Rāgapāsa*, SN.I.124.

The fierce and venomous snake¹⁶¹ illustrates the tendency of a hot-tempered person. He is quick to anger and his anger lasts long. Furthermore, attachment to life is considered as deadly as a poisonous snake (*āsiviso ghoraviso*). Just as a man who wants to live always keeps away from a snake, so should one release oneself from the tendency of grasping¹⁶², since sensual pleasure is as bitter as a snake's poison:

*Kāmā kaṭukā āsivisūpamā
yesu mucchitā bālā
te dīgharattaṃ niraye
samappitā haññante dukkhitā*¹⁶³

(Sensual pleasures, in which fools are bemused, (are) bitter like a snake's poison. Consigned to hell for long time, they (fools) are beaten, pained)¹⁶⁴

Therefore, the bhikkhu should give up the higher as well as the lower worlds, just as a snake sheds its worn-out skin.¹⁶⁵

From animal to insects:

*Yathā pi bhamaro pupphaṃ
vaṇṇagandhaṃ aheṭayaṃ
phaleti rasam ādāya
evaṃ gāme munī care*¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ *Āgataviso ca ghoraviso ca āsiviso*, AN.II.110.

¹⁶² MN.II. 261.

¹⁶³ Thi. 451.

¹⁶⁴ K.R.Norman, *Elders' Verses* II, p. 45

¹⁶⁵ *Urago jinnaṃ 'va taccam purāṇam*, Sn.1-17

¹⁶⁶ DhP .49.

(Even as a bee gathers honey from a flower and departs without injuring the flower or its colour or scent, so let a sage dwell in his village)¹⁶⁷;

and:

*Ye rāgarattānupatanti sotam
sayam katam makkato 'va jātam*¹⁶⁸

(Those who are slaves to passions follow the stream (of craving) as a spider in the web, which he has made himself)¹⁶⁹.

Just as, when flies are being carried on carrying-pole or on a basket, it does not occur to them: “This (life) of ours is impermanent, everlasting or eternal”.¹⁷⁰ They enjoy themselves and do not think about their situation, so do the deities find delight in heaven and ignore their state of impermanence.

Birds occupy a prominent place in similes. The flight of birds in the sky symbolizes the life of the emancipated person.¹⁷¹ It is hard to trace the path of the arahant who is totally detached from worldly things. Thus, birds are, in general, compared to the attitude of non-attachment, the special quality of monkhood:

“Just as a bird with its wings carrying it wherever it flies, so the monks are satisfied with sufficiency of robes and food”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.75

¹⁶⁸ Dhp. 347.

¹⁶⁹ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.167.

¹⁷⁰ MN.III. 148.

¹⁷¹ Dhp. 92, 93.

The swan (*haṃsa*) is especially used as a simile illustrating noble ideas. Swans depart from the lake, directed towards the path of the sun, just like the wise leaving house after house.¹⁷³ The swansong, beautiful and well modulated¹⁷⁴, is compared to the sweet voice of the Buddha¹⁷⁵. A crow, on the other hand, presents the opposite picture, since it is easy to live without shame like a crow.¹⁷⁶ The simile of the crow in the Sonaka Jātaka shows the danger of sensual pleasure. Greedily consuming the flesh of a carcass floating down the river, the crow is swept to the perils of the sea.¹⁷⁷

3.3.2 Similes dealing with natural surroundings.

Natural surroundings provide abundant objects for making creative similes. In this type of simile, we encounter fields with paddy and barley, the palmary palm, the sāla tree, the banyan, bamboo groves, flowers and creepers, fruits and seeds, grass and thorns, and so on.

The paddy field, together with farm-work, provides an apt illustration of human life. Thus:

Action is the field, consciousness the food, and craving the moisture which leads to the rebirth of a being". But when the field is not supplied with water, even fertile soil, and proper cultivation, will not produce a good harvest. In the same manner, those who engage in wrong practices, which are

¹⁷² DN.I. 71.

¹⁷³ Dh. 91, 175.

¹⁷⁴ Th. 1270.

¹⁷⁵ *Khippaṃ giram eraya vagguvaggaṃ
haṃsā va paggayha saṇiṃ nikūja*, Sn. 350.

¹⁷⁶ *Sijvaṃ ahirikenā kākasūrena*, Dh. 244

¹⁷⁷ Jā V. 25

opposed to the Noble Eightfold Path, cannot fulfill the meritorious aspirations of supporters.¹⁷⁸

and:

Just as weeds are the bane of the field, so craving, hatred, delusion and selfish desires are the bane of mankind; therefore, offerings made to those who are released from such banes yield abundant fruit.¹⁷⁹

The palm tree provides a fitting illustration for the extinction of rebirth. A palm tree whose crown is cut off cannot grow further.¹⁸⁰ Likewise the perfect one has destroyed all cankers and defilement that cause rebirth. Just as the banyan tree with its large shadow and spreading branches provides a haven of rest for all the winged creatures round about¹⁸¹ so, similarly, does the religious person provide comfort to all in trouble.

The jungle (*vana*) is allegorically compared to craving (*taṇhāvana*). A bhikkhu is able to obtain deliverance, if he totally cuts down this jungle:

Vanaṃ chindatha mā rukkhaṃ
vanato jāyatī bhayaṃ
chetvā vanaṃ ca vanathaṃ ca
*nibbāna hotha bhikkhavo*¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ *Kammaṃ khettaṃ viññāṇaṃ bījaṃ taṇhā sinehaṃ*, AN.I. 223.

¹⁷⁹ AN.IV. 237.

¹⁸⁰ *Anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassā ti*, MN.I. 37.

¹⁸¹ *Dinnaṃ hoti mahapphalaṃ*", Dh.p.356-359.

¹⁸² Dh.p. 283.

(Cut down the (whole) forest, not the tree (only): danger comes out of the forest. Having cut down both forest and desire, O mendicants, do you attain freedom).¹⁸³

The creeper is frequently used for the growth of craving in a heedless man:

*Manujassa pamattacārino
taṇhā vaḍḍhati māluvā viya
so plavati hurāhuraṃ phalam
icc ahaṃ va vanasmim vānaro*¹⁸⁴

(The craving of a thoughtless man grows like a creeper. Like a monkey wishing for fruit in a forest, he bounds hither and thither (from one life to another))¹⁸⁵.

The lotus is the popular simile for purity. It grows from the muddy soil but does not become defiled. In the same manner, the Buddha grows up and dwells in the world, but he is not defiled by the world. The simile of the lotus occurs several times in the Pāli Suttas.¹⁸⁶ In the Khandha Saṃyutta, the Buddha compares himself to a lotus:

Bhikkhus, just as a blue, red or white lotus is born in the water, it stands unsullied by the water, so too was the Tathāgata born in the world and grew up in the world, but having overcome the world, he dwells unsullied by the world.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit.,p 149.

¹⁸⁴ Dh.p. 334.

¹⁸⁵ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.164.

¹⁸⁶ AN.II. p 38, Sn. 547, Th. 700-701.

¹⁸⁷ SN.III.138.

Using the simile of a lotus-pond, the Buddha points out the different characters of beings:

Just as, in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and some other lotuses that are born and grow and rest on the water's surface, and some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rise out of the water and stand clear, unwetted by it.¹⁸⁸

The thorn has become the object of rejection: "Whatever object in the world is dear and delightful is called a thorn in the noble discipline"¹⁸⁹. The Buddha commended the elder Nanda for his attainment of arahantship, "having crushed down the thorn of lust"¹⁹⁰.

And the thorn provides a sense of care for those who wander about:

*Yathā kaṇṭakaṭṭhānamhi - careyya anupāhano
satim upaṭṭhapetvāna - evaṃ game munī care*¹⁹¹

(As one might go shoeless in thorny place, if he summoned up mindfulness, so should a sage go in a village)¹⁹²

The Suttanipāta is full of similes involving plant-life. For instance: "Be straight and unattached as the bamboo-shoot"¹⁹³; give up the worldly life as a tree sheds its leaves"¹⁹⁴,

¹⁸⁸ MN.I.169-170.

¹⁸⁹ SN.I. 189.

¹⁹⁰ Ud. 24.

¹⁹¹ Th. 946.

¹⁹² K.R.Norman, op.cit., p.88.

¹⁹³ *Vamsākālīro 'va asajjamāno*, Sn. 38

and:

*Phalānam iva pakkānaṃ
pāto papatanābhayaṃ
evaṃ jātānaṃ maccānaṃ
niccaṃ maraṇato bhayaṃ*¹⁹⁵

(Just as for ripe fruit there is constantly fear of falling, so for mortals who are born there is constantly fear of death)¹⁹⁶

We find in the Dhammapada similar motifs:

*Kuso yathā duggahito
hatthaṃ evānukantati
sāmaññaṃ dupparāmaṭṭhaṃ
nirayāyūpakaḍḍhati*¹⁹⁷

(As a blade of grass when wrongly handled cuts the hand, so also asceticism when wrongly tied leads to hell)¹⁹⁸;

and again:

*Na pupphagandho paṭivātameti
na candanaṃ tagaramallikāvā
satañ ca gandho paṭivatameti
sabbā disā sappuruso pavāti*¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ *Samcinnapatto yathā pāricitto*, Sn. 54.

¹⁹⁵ Sn. 576.

¹⁹⁶ K.R.Norman, op.cit., p. 67.

¹⁹⁷ Dh. 311.

¹⁹⁸ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p.157.

¹⁹⁹ Dh. 54.

(The scent of flower does not travel against the wind, nor that of sandalwood or of *tagara* and *mallika* flowers, but the fragrance of the good people travels even against wind. A good man pervades every quarter)²⁰⁰.

The Theragāthā and Therīgāthā frequently depict the mental ease of the monks and nuns whose minds have attained the supreme deliverance. Many of the similes in these two spiritual texts express delight in nature.²⁰¹ Girimānandatthera sits in a well-roofed hut, his mind calm and tranquil. Outside the rain falls slowly. The elder compares the falling rain to a sweet melody:

*Vassati devo yathā sigītaṃ
channā me kuṭikā sukhā nivātā
tassaṃ viharāmi vūpasanto
atha ce pattayasi pavassa devo*²⁰²

(The sky (deva) rains melodiously, my small hut is roofed, pleasant and draught-free. In it I dwell calm; so rain, sky(deva), if you wish)²⁰³

Natural surroundings serve as objective lessons, which enable the monks and nuns to reach the final goal. Patācārā observed bubbles arising as she washed her feet with water:

²⁰⁰ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit.,p. 77.

²⁰¹ Maurice Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, Vol II, (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1991), p. 103.

²⁰² Th. 325.

²⁰³ K.R.Norman, op.cit, p.36.

Pādodakañ ca disvāna thalato ninnam āgataṃ

*Tato cittaṃ samādemi assaṃ bhadraṃ va jāniyaṃ*²⁰⁴

(Having washed my feet, I paid attention to waters, seeing the foot-water come to the low land from the high land, then concentrated my mind, like a noble thoroughbred horse)²⁰⁵

3.4 Conclusion

An attempt has therefore been made, based on van Zeyst's article, at drawing attention to three salient features of similes as used in the Pali Nikāyas. There are, however, further aspects of the use of similes to be explored. These include:

1. How a simile illuminates the meaning of a particular topic
2. How a simile makes appeal to the various levels of the audience; and
3. How it is important that they be presented at a time which is appropriate.

It is to these that we must now turn.

²⁰⁴ Th. 114.

²⁰⁵ K.R.Norman, op, cit., p.15.

Chapter 4

The Use and the Function of Similes in the Pāli Nikāyas

4.1 Similes used for the purpose of explaining religious teachings.

The Buddha's teaching is described as follows: "This Dhamma is profound, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise"²⁰⁶.

However, the Buddha and his disciples found the way to convey this profound teaching to the masses by means of similes. Similes form one of the most appealing parts of the Pāli Nikāyas. Without them, the teaching of the Buddha often seems remote and abstract.²⁰⁷

Throughout the Pāli Nikāyas, we come across various applications of similes for specific purposes. There are similes used for the sake of:

1. Delivering a religious teaching
2. Delivering an ethical teaching
3. Argumentation
4. Poetic purpose.

A detailed discussion of each is now given.

²⁰⁶ MN.I. p.160.

²⁰⁷ Sudharma Pandith, *The Role of Similes in the Pāli Nikāyas*, (Sri Lanka Buddhist Philosophy and Culture, 1987), p.281.

4.1.1 Similes used for the sake of delivering a religious teaching.

Similes are often used for the purpose of delivering a religious teaching.²⁰⁸ The simile of the raft illustrates the proper attitude towards the Dhamma, the simile of the snake the danger of grasping Dhamma wrongly, the simile of the skeleton the danger of sensual pleasure, the simile of seed and fruit the teaching of kamma and rebirth, the simile of the dew-drop on the blade of grass the teaching of impermanence, the simile of the flame of an extinguished lamp the teaching of nibbāna; and so on. In these particular applications, similes represent very skillful means. They convey the teaching in a conducive manner, give a very clear explanation and very vividly illustrate the most abstract doctrines. We will now examine some of the above similes.

4.1.2 The Dhamma as means to the end of suffering

It is extremely necessary to fully understand the Dhamma. Even though the Dhamma is highly esteemed in the Buddhist tradition, it is merely a means to an end.²⁰⁹ One should not cling to it. This idea is aptly illustrated by the simile of the raft (*kullūpama*) in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*.²¹⁰ This is one of the most frequently cited similes. One man crosses over a river by means of a raft. Then, setting aside the burden of the raft, he goes wherever he wishes. The Dhamma taught by the Buddha is likened to the raft, because the Dhamma has only the purpose of crossing over, not that of clinging.²¹¹ The following relevant statement should be borne in mind:\

²⁰⁸ Eugene Watson Burlingame, *Buddhist Parable*, (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1991), Preface, P.XXI.

²⁰⁹ Jotiya Dhirasekara, *Parable of the Snake*, A Translation of the *Alagaddāpama Sutta*, (Sri Lanka, The Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1983), p.3.

²¹⁰ MN.I.PP.135-136.

*Kullūpamaṃ vo, bhikkhave, dhammaṃ desitaṃ,
ājānantehi dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pageva adhammā*²¹²

(Bhikkhus, when you know the Dhamma to be similar to a raft, you should abandon even good states, how much more so bad states)²¹³.

In this usage, the simile of the raft helps to clarify the most difficult problem in Buddhist moral philosophy.²¹⁴

4.1.3 The danger of sensual pleasure

At the beginning of the *Alagaddūpama sutta*, the Buddha reminds us of the danger of sensual pleasure (*kāmānaṃ ādīnava*). It would seem that the following heretical view had appeared among his disciples, in that the monk Ariṭṭha had come to hold the view that there was no harm in sensual pleasure. On that occasion, the Buddha emphasized the inevitable consequence of sensual pleasure: “I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great the danger is in them”²¹⁵.

The Buddha then illustrates the danger of sensual pleasure by giving similes involving the following;

1. A skeleton: *aṭṭhikaṅkalūpamā*
2. A piece of meat: *maṃsapesūpamā*
3. A grass torch: *tiṇukkūpamā*
4. A pit of coals: *aṅgārakāsūpamā*
5. A dream: *supinakūpamā*

²¹¹ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit, p. 229.

²¹² MN.I. 136.

²¹³ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit, p. 229.

²¹⁴ Sudharma Pandith, op.cit, p. 281.

²¹⁵ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit, p. 227.

6. Borrowed goods: *yācitakūpamā*
7. A tree laden with fruit: *rukkhaphalūpamā*
8. A slaughterhouse: *asisūnūpamā*
9. A sword stake: *sattisūlūpamā*
10. A snake's head: *sappasirūpamā*

The *Potaliya Sutta*²¹⁶ contains the first seven similes. A hungry dog gnaws at a bone thrown by a butcher, but cannot subdue his hunger with a mere bone. A vulture seizing a piece of meat is attacked fiercely by his fellow vultures. A man carries a blazing torch of grass against the wind. Certainly the fire burns his body, or some part of it. A man comes to a charcoal pit of red-hot coals. A man sleeps and dreams of many beautiful scenes, but when he wakes up all pictures vanish. A man adorns himself with borrowed ornaments, but whenever their owner sees him he immediately takes back his property. A man climbs a tree and eats some fruit, but then another man arrives and starts to fell the tree. Sensual pleasures are thus futile and full of danger. They bring much suffering and despair.²¹⁷ The simile of a heap of snares (*pāsarāsim*) in the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*²¹⁸ and the simile of bait (*nivāpa*) in the *Nivāpa Sutta*²¹⁹ illustrate the same point. Thus, the similes in these Pāli Suttas vividly show the futility and evil consequences of sensual pleasure.

4.1.4 The teaching of kamma and rebirth

Similes involving a seed and its fruit are frequently utilized in connection with teachings on kamma and rebirth. For instance, a verse occurring in the *Sakka Saṃyutta* reads as follows:

²¹⁶ MN.I. 364-367.

²¹⁷ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit. p. 225.

²¹⁸ MN.I.174-175.

*Yādisaṃ vapate bījaṃ
tādisaṃ labhate phalaṃ
kalyāṇakāri kalyāṇaṃ
pāpakāri ca pāpakaṃ*²²⁰

(According to the seed that's sown, so is the fruit reaped therefrom. Doer of good will gather good, doer of evil evil (reaps)).

The correlation between action (*kamma*) and result (*vipāka*) is shown by two similes in the opening verses of the Dhammapada:

*Tato naṃ dukkham anveti
cakkam 'va vahato padaṃ*²²¹

(Suffering follows him just as the wheel follows the foot of the bull that draws the cart);

and:

*Tato naṃ sukham anveti
chāyā 'va anapāyini*²²²

(Happiness follows him just like a shadow that never leaves him).

The simile of the wheels of a cart and the shadow beautifully illustrate the inevitable results of good and bad actions. They make a great impression on the listeners' minds. As a result, the audience easily

²¹⁹ MN.I.154-160.

²²⁰ SN.I.227.

²²¹ Dh.p. 1.

absorbs the meaning intended, that is to say, the relationship between an action and its result. Here, similes effectively perform a psychological function.

The Buddhist doctrine of kamma, however, is not a deterministic theory. Dealing with this idea, the simile of the lump of salt (*loṇa*) in the *Loṇaphala Sutta*²²³ is a felicitous illustration. If a man puts a lump of salt into a small cup of water, the water in this cup becomes salty and undrinkable. But if a man puts a similar lump of salt into the river *Gaṅgā*, the water in the river will not thereby become salty and undrinkable. Similarly, a trifling evil deed committed by a person who has not lived a good life may lead him to hell, whereas a similar trifling evil deed committed by a cultured man may not produce any result at all.²²⁴ In this usage, a simile serves as an effective means of explaining the abstract teaching of kamma and rebirth.

The simile of a lump of salt reminds us of one of the most significant utterances by the Buddha:

*Seyyathāpi bhikkhave mahāsamuddo ekaraso loṇaraso, evam eva kho bhikkhave ayaṃ dhammavinayo ekaraso vimuttiraso*²²⁵
(Monks, just as the ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt, even so does this discipline of the Dhamma have but one flavour, the flavour of deliverance).²²⁶

An Arahant has experienced this taste. For him: “There is no more coming to any state of being”.²²⁷ This worthy one is analogously

²²² Dh. 2.

²²³ AN.I.249-250.

²²⁴ David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis*, (Honolulu, The University Press of Hawaii, 1976), p.48.

²²⁵ Ud. 56.

compared to a man who has crossed safely over to the far shore (*pāraṃgata*)²²⁸, or to a person who has crossed over a flood (*oghaṭiṇṇo*)²²⁹.

4.1.5 The fleeting nature of life

Impermanence is a universal characteristic. Everything incessantly changes from moment to moment. Even though a certain person can live more than one hundred years, this human lifespan is very short and limited. It is just like a dewdrop on a blade of grass:

Ussāvo'va tiṇaggamhi

suriyassuggaṇaṃ pati

*evaṃ āyu manussānaṃ*²³⁰

(The dewdrop on the blade of grass vanishes when the sun rises.
Such is a human's span of life)

Therefore, one should do good things and lead a life of purity. Just as the one whose head is burning has to extinguish the fire immediately,²³¹ so do we have to do something to fulfil our valuable life. A human's life span is compared to:

1. A bubble (*udakabubbulaṃ*)

When rain falls from the sky in thick drops, a bubble appearing on the water will quickly vanish and will not last long.

2. A line drawn on water (*udake daṇḍarāji*): a line drawn on water with a stick will quickly vanish.

²²⁶ J.D. Ireland, *The Udāna*, (Kandy: BPS, 1997), p. 74.

²²⁷ *Natthi 'dāni punabbhavo*, MN.I. 184.

²²⁸ MN.I. 135.

²²⁹ Sn.1082.

²³⁰ Jā IV. 122.

3. A mountain stream (*nadī pabbateyyā*): a mountain stream swiftly flows from afar. It will continue to flow and not stand still for a moment.
4. A lump of spittle (*khelapiṇḍam*): A strong man may form a lump of spittle on the tip of his tongue and spit it out with ease.
5. A piece of meat (*maṃsapesī*): A piece of meat thrown into an iron pot that has been heated all day will quickly dissolve.
6. A cow (*gāvī*) to be slaughtered: Just as a cow, about to be slaughtered, being led to the shambles, each time she raises her foot moves nearer to destruction, nearer to death.²³²

Although we are able to express the brevity of human life in words, the above-mentioned similes nonetheless make the point much more easily. The similes of the dewdrop, a bubble, and cow to be slaughtered, and so on, inspire one's thought about the fragility of life. As a result, we lose attachment to this temporary life and cultivate an attitude of detachment. It is thus interesting to note that similes not only illustrate a teaching, but can also lead to its practical application.

4.2. Similes used for the sake of delivering an ethical teaching.

Similes convey the Buddha's ethical teaching in an effective way. The gradual purification of the mind is compared to the work of a silversmith.²³³ The cultivation of good deeds is like a water pot filled with

²³¹ SN.I. 108.

²³² AN.I. 136.

²³³ Dh.p. 239.

drops of water²³⁴. Abounding with befitting similes, this Dhammapada verse explains how the wise control their mind:

*Udakaṃ hi nayanti nettikā
usukārā namayanti tejanam
dāruṃ namayanti tacchakā
attānaṃ damayanti paṇḍitā*²³⁵.

(Engineers (who build canals and aqueducts) lead the water to wherever they like, fletchers make the arrow straight, carpenters carve the wood; wise people fashion (discipline) themselves)²³⁶

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta illustrates mindfulness of breathing with the simile of a skilled turner.²³⁷ Further similes explain the extent to which monks should endure all difficulties, the importance of true speech, and the cultivation of mind. The Sāmaññaphala Sutta depicts the whole process of spiritual advancement with a series of beautiful similes. We shall now examine similar similes in other Suttas;

4.2.1 Similes in the Kakacūpama Sutta²³⁸

The *Kakacūpama Sutta* expounds the teaching of patience (*khanti*). Monks have to practice this quality when confronted by speech, whether timely or untimely, true or untrue, gentle or harsh, that is connected with good or with harm, or spoken with a mind of loving-kindness or inner hate.²³⁹ In no situation do they ever utter evil words. Their minds will remain unchanged and pervade the individual, as well as

²³⁴ Dh.p. 112.

²³⁵ Dh.p. 80.

²³⁶ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit. p. 85.

²³⁷ MN.I. 57.

²³⁸ MN.I.128-129.

²³⁹ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit, p. 221.

the whole world, with loving-kindness. This practice is illustrated with a number of similes:

1. The simile of a man with a hoe and a basket (*kuddālapitakaṃ*): A man tries to change this great earth with a hoe and a basket. He digs the soil, strews, spits and urinates here and there, saying: “Be without earth, be without earth”. Certainly he fails because this great earth is deep and immense. This man gets only weariness and disappointment.²⁴⁰ Similarly, gentle or harsh words do not affect the mind of the trained disciple.
2. The simile of a man with crimson, turmeric, indigo or carmine (*lākhaṃ vā haliddaṃ vā nīlaṃ vā mañjeṭṭhiṃ*): One man wants to draw pictures and make pictures appear on empty space with crimson, turmeric, indigo or carmine. He cannot do this task because empty space is formless and invisible. Again, the man will reap only weariness and disappointment.²⁴¹
3. The simile of a man with a torch of blazing grass (*ādittaṃ tiṇukkaṃ*): There is a man who intends to heat up and burn away the river *Gaṅgā* with a torch of blazing grass. His idea is mere imagination because the river *Gaṅgā* is deep and immense.²⁴²
4. The simile of the cat-skin bag (*biḷārabhastā*): There is a cat-skin bag that is well rubbed, soft, and silky. A man comes with

²⁴⁰ Ibid, P.221.

²⁴¹ Ibid, p.221.

²⁴² Ibid, p.222.

stick and tries to make it rustle and crackle. His effort is in vain because that bag is well rubbed, soft and silky.²⁴³

These four similes give a very clear illustration of the practice of patience. Furthermore, the Buddha taught this most difficult practice with the simile of the saw (*kakacūpama*). Supposing bandits cut a monk limb by limb with two-handled saws. If the victim has thoughts of anger towards the bandits, he has not yet practised the Buddha's teachings accordingly. Effective and convincing similes are provided by this sutta. They vividly illustrate the ethical teaching and encourage us to practise it.

4.2.2 Similes in the Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta²⁴⁴

In this sutta, the Buddha gives instruction to his son, the novice Rāhula. He stresses the value of right speech and reflection by using selected similes. To draw the attention of the seven year-old child, the Buddha uses the simile of a water vessel (*udakādhāna*). First, he leaves a little water in the vessel, then throws away the little water that is left, turns the water vessel upside down, and then turns it the right way up again. Pointing out the different conditions of the water vessel, the Buddha speaks of the futility of recluseship on the part of those who intentionally tell lies.

The little water in the water vessel denotes the little value of the recluse who tells a lie without shame. As with the water vessel, his position is that of being thrown away, turned upside down, hollow and empty. He has lost all honour and respect because of wrong speech. The simile of the water vessel gives a very clear illustration such that even a small child can understand the intended teaching.

²⁴³ Ibid, p.222.

²⁴⁴ MN.I.415-416.

The Buddha also instructs Rāhula how to reflect on his own actions. Just as a mirror (*ādāsa*) is used for the purpose of reflection, so should one repeatedly think about one's bodily, verbal and mental actions. If such actions produce harmful results for oneself and for others, they should be given up. But if they bring about benefit for oneself and for others, those actions should be continued. As a result of these similes, the ethical teachings of the Buddha cease to appear dry and rigid and, on the contrary, become interesting and readily intelligible.

4.2.3 Similes in the Bhāvanā Sutta.²⁴⁵

The ethical teaching of the Buddha stresses the importance of the cultivation of the mind. A cultivated mind brings abundant benefit. As the Dhammapada states:

*Cittam dantam sukhāvaham*²⁴⁶

(A tamed mind brings of happiness)²⁴⁷

It is very difficult to train the mind, but if one zealously develops one's own mind in a proper way, one is able to master one's mental activities. The *Bhāvanā Sutta* states that when a monk is engaged in meditative practice in accordance with the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiyadhamma*), even though he may not expect the result, his mind will gradually become free from all defilements. The inevitable result of mental development is allegorically described in the three following similes.

1. Just as if eight or ten or a dozen hen's eggs were fully sat upon, were fully warmed and fully made to become, although

²⁴⁵ AN.I.126-127.

²⁴⁶ Dhp. 36.

²⁴⁷ S.Radhakrishnan, op.cit.p.70.

any such wish might not come to the hen...yet those chicks...would hatch out safely...because the eggs were fully made to become. In just the same way, monks, although a monk might not express such a wish, his heart would be freed from the cankers and from attachment²⁴⁸

2. Just as a carpenter or a carpenter's apprentice, inspecting the handle of his adze, sees thereon the marks of his fingers and thumb, knows not how much of the adze-handle was worn away that day, nor the previous day, nor at any time, yet knows just when the wearing away has reached the end of wearing away, even so, monks, a monk intent on making become, knows not to what extent the cankers were worn away that day, nor the previous day, nor at any time, yet knows just when the wearing away has reached the end of wearing away.²⁴⁹

3. Just as in an ocean-going ship, rigged with mast and stays, after it has sailed the seas for six months and is beached on the shore for the winter, the stays, affected by wind and heat, rained upon in the rainy-season, easily weaken and rot away, even so, monks, in a monk abiding intent upon making become, the fetters easily weaken and rot away.²⁵⁰

Likewise, the minds of those who have fully developed their minds will become free from all fetters and defilements. Such application of these similes shows Buddhist ethics to be a practical teaching.

²⁴⁸ Nyanaponika Thera, *The Discourse Collection in Numerical Order*, An Anthology, Part II, tr, (Kandy, BPS, 1988), p. 88.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 88.

4.2.4 Similes in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*.²⁵¹

A whole series of beautiful similes is to be found in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*. This sutta deals with the fruits of the life of a recluse. It describes in detail the life led by the monk who lives in accordance with the ethical teaching of the Buddha. He mindfully restrains himself with the restraint of the rules, guards the faculties of sense, and cultivates mental culture. As a result, his mind gradually becomes free of the five hindrances and defilements. This monk is then able to attain the four jhānas, various kinds of higher knowledge, and nibbāṇa. This whole process of spiritual advancement is illustrated by a number of similes. These similes not only concern the ethical teaching but also enrich the literary value of the Pāli Nikāyas.

The first five similes make known the states of mind which overcome the five hindrances. Being strong obstacles, the five hindrances (*pañcanīvaraṇa*) hinder the way to deliverance. They are sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thīnamiddha*) agitation and worry (*uddhaccakukkucca*) and doubt (*vicikicchā*). Overcoming of these hindrances is compared to:

1. The simile of a debtor who is able to pay off his debt :

Suppose that a man, taking a loan, invests it in his business affairs. His business affairs succeed. He repays his old debts and there is extra left over for maintaining his wife. The thought would occur to him, “Before, taking a loan, I invested it in my business affairs. Now my business affairs have succeeded. I have repaid my old debts and there is extra left over for

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 89.

maintaining my wife.” Because of that he would experience joy and happiness.²⁵²

2. The simile of a patient who recovers from sickness:

Suppose that a man falls sick, is in pain and seriously ill. He does not enjoy his meals, and there is no strength in his body. As time passes, he eventually recovers from that sickness. He enjoys his meals and strength returns to his body. The thought would occur to him, “Before, I was sick .Now I am recovered from that sickness. I enjoy my meals and there is strength in my body.” Because of that he would experience joy and happiness.²⁵³

3. The simile of a prisoner who was released from a prison:

Suppose that a man is bound in prison. As time passes, he eventually is released from that bondage, safe and sound, with no loss of property. The thought would occur to him, “Before, I was bound in prison. Now I am released from that bondage, safe and sound, with no loss of my property.” Because of that he would experience joy and happiness.

4. The simile about a slave who gets freed from slavery:

Suppose that a man is a slave, subject to others, not subject to himself, unable to go where he likes. As time passes, he eventually is released from that slavery, subject to himself, not

²⁵¹ DN.I.72-85.

²⁵² Maurice Walshe, *op.cit.* p.101.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, p.101.

subject to others, freed, able to go where he likes. The thought would occur to him, “Before, I was a slave .Now I am released from that slavery, subject to myself, not subject to others, freed, able to go where I like.” Because of that he would experience joy and happiness.²⁵⁴

5.The simile of a wealthy man who travels through a desert safely:

Suppose that a man, carrying money and goods, is traveling by a road through desolate country. As time passes, he eventually emerges from that desolate country, safe and sound, with no loss of property. The thought would occur to him, “Before, carrying money and goods, I was traveling by a road through desolate country. Now I have emerged from that desolate country, safe and sound, with no loss of my property.” Because of that he would experience joy and happiness.²⁵⁵

When the monk perceives the disappearance of the five hindrances in him, it is as if he were freed from debt, from sickness, from bonds, from slavery, and from the perils of the desert. These types of simile are repeatedly mentioned in the Pāli Nikāyas with regard to the overcoming of the five hindrances. To explain the fruits of his ethical teaching, the Buddha made use of familiar situations. The remaining similes in this Sutta illustrate the attainment of the four trances, the various kinds of higher knowledge and the ultimate goal, nibbāna.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p.102.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 102.

The last simile of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, the simile of deep pool water (*udakarahado*), exhibits knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. Just like, in the midst of the mountains, there may be a pond, clear as a possible mirror, where a man with good eyesight standing on the bank, could see oyster-shells, gravel-blanks, and shoals of fish, on the move or stationary,²⁵⁶ so the monk experiences within himself the vision of emancipation (*vimuttiñāṇadassana*).

The beautiful similes in this sutta serve as fitting illustrations for the Buddha. They indicate the fact that the user had attained the highest goal and enjoyed the fruits of the life of recluse.²⁵⁷

4.3. Similes used for the sake of argumentation

In the Pāli Suttas, we find that similes are the most convenient method of argumentation.²⁵⁸ The Pāli Suttas frequently record the doctrinal debates between the great disciples, between the Buddha and his disciples, and between the Buddha and the heretics. As the debates proceed, similes are used appropriately and forcefully to prove doctrinal points. In this type of usage, the user sometimes puts similes into a list in order to draw the minds of listeners to the conclusion to which they lead. It is well known that the simile of the relay of chariots illustrates the seven stages of purification, that the simile of the recluse possessed of supernormal power the utmost importance of mental action, whilst a series of attractive similes in the *Pāyāsi Sutta* illustrate how to rid a person of wrong view.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p.173.

²⁵⁷ Angraj Chaudhary, *Essays on Buddhism and Pāli Literature*, (Delhi, Eastern Book Linkers, 1994), p.155.

²⁵⁸ Maurice Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol.II. (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1991), pp.73-74.

4.3.1 Similes in the Rathavināta Sutta.²⁵⁹

The *Rathavināta Sutta* relates a Dhamma-talk between two of the Buddha's chief disciples, the Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta and the Venerable Sāriputta. In the Buddha's dispensation, there are the following seven stages in the process of purity:

Purification of Virtue (*Sīlavisuddhi*)

Purification of Consciousness (*Cittavisuddhi*)

Purification of View (*Diṭṭhivisuddhi*)

Purification of Overcoming Doubt

(*Kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhi*)

Purification by Knowledge and Vision of what is
and what is not the Path

(*Maggāmaggañāṇadassanavisuddhi*)

Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way

(*Paṭipadāñāṇadassanavisuddhi*)

Purification by Knowledge and Vision

(*Ñāṇadassanavisuddhi*)

The Ven. Sāriputta asks whether the life of purity is lived for the sake of such stages. According to the Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāniputta, its main purpose is not confined to any stage. He was of opinion that the holy life is lived under the Exalted One only for the sake of nibbāna without clinging²⁶⁰ (*anupādā parinibbāna*).

This final aim is, however, successively attained in a series of seven stages. The Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta clarifies this idea by saying: "As to that, friend, I shall give you a simile, for wise men

²⁵⁹ MN.I. 149-150.

understand the meaning of a statement by means of a simile”²⁶¹. In this case, it is the simile of the relay of chariots (*rathavinīta*) that is given.

Suppose that King Pasenadi Kosala while living at Sāvatti had some urgent business to settle at Saketa, and that between Sāvatti and Saketa seven relay chariots were kept ready for him. Then King Pasenadi of Kosala, leaving Sāvatti through the inner palace door, would mount the first relay chariot, and by means of the first relay chariot he would arrive at the second relay chariot; then he would dismount from the first relay chariot and mount the second relay chariot...the third .the fourth .by means of the fourth, the fifth .by means of the fifth, the sixth .by means of the sixth he would reach the seventh relay chariot. By means of the seventh relay chariot he would arrive at the inner palace door in Saketa²⁶²

So too, friend, purification of virtue is for the sake of reaching purification of mind; purification of mind is for the sake of reaching purification of view; purification of view is for the sake of reaching purification by overcoming doubt; purification by overcoming doubt is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path; purification by knowledge and vision of what is path and what is not the path is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision of the way; purification by knowledge and vision of the way is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision; purification of knowledge

²⁶⁰ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit,p.242

²⁶¹ MN.I.149

and vision is for the sake of reaching final Nibbāṇa without clinging. It is for the sake of final Nibbāṇa without clinging that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One²⁶³

In the case of the seven purifications, the purity implied is reckoned in terms of the elimination of the unwholesome factors opposed to each purification.

4.3.2 Similes in the Aggivacchagotta Sutta²⁶⁴

During the lifetime of the Buddha, the ascetics and wanderers belonging to many religious systems engaged in metaphysical speculation. They quarreled with one another over the ten undeclared questions (*avyākatāni*). Such questions involve whether the self (*jīva*) is identical with the body (*sarīra*), or the self is different from the body, and so on. According to the Buddha, all metaphysical speculations are meaningless. He totally ignored all the *avyākatāni* questions because they were not related to the foundation of the higher life (*brahmacariya*).

One such was the wander *Vacchagotta*, who often approaches the Buddha and asks many questions about the *attā*. In the *Aggivacchagotta Sutta*, he sets forth four questions: whether the liberated monk reappears after death, whether he does not reappear, whether he both reappears and does not reappear, or whether he neither reappears nor does not reappear?²⁶⁵ The Buddha rejects all these questions because they do not apply to the person whose mind has become released from all defilements. The Buddha's disapproval simply causes Vacchagotta to become even more confused. To give more clarity to this intricate

²⁶² Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit. pp. 243-245

²⁶³ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit. pp. 243-245

²⁶⁴ MN.I. 487-489.

²⁶⁵ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, op.cit, p.592.

problem, the Buddha utilises the simile of an extinguished fire (*so aggi nibbāyeyya*):

“What do you think, Vaccha? Suppose a fire were burning before you. Would you know: ‘This fire is burning before me?’ ”

“I would, Master Gotama”

“If someone were to ask you, Vaccha: ‘Dependent upon what does the fire burning before you burn?’ ”

“Being asked thus, Master Gotama, I would answer: ‘This fire burning before me burns dependent upon grass and sticks’ ”.

“If that fire before you were to be extinguished, would you know: ‘This fire before me has been extinguished?’ ”

“I would, Master Gotama”

“If someone were to ask you, Vaccha ‘when that fire before you was extinguished, to which direction did it go: to the east, the west, the north, or the south?’ Being asked thus, what would you answer?”

“That does not apply, Master Gotama. The fire burned dependent upon its fuel of grass and sticks. When that is used up, if it does not get any more fuel, being without fuel, it is reckoned as extinguished”²⁶⁶

The Buddha then explains that, as with the fire, the Tathāgata does not appear anymore after death, since he has already abandoned all the material form. He has eradicated its roots. So there is nothing future to fuel the arising of the Tathāgata.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 593.

The simile of the extinguished fire in the above conversation is appealing and highly persuasive. Its aptness helps to ward off all kinds of metaphysical speculation in the mind of the wanderer Vacchagotta. He realizes his wrong view and abandons it. Thus, similes are often much more effective than mere argumentation alone.

4.3.3 Similes in the Pāyāsi Sutta²⁶⁷

Similes serve to give greater force and vividness to what is said or described.²⁶⁸ This fact is proved by a series of illuminating similes in the *Pāyāsi Sutta*. Prince Pāyāsi is said to have held the wrong view that: “There is no other world, there are no spontaneously born beings, there is no fruit or result of good evil deeds”.²⁶⁹ To convince Pāyāsi of his wrong view, the Venerable Kumārakasapa skillfully makes use of a number of similes. Firstly, he mentions the main purpose of the simile:

*Upamāya pi idh' ekacce viññū purisā bhāsitassa atthaṃ ājānanti*²⁷⁰.

(Some wise people understand what is said by means of similes)²⁷¹.

The first among the many convincing similes in this sutta provides a good example of skilful means for the augmentation of some point. Prince Pāyāsi argues that he has trustworthy friends, companions and relatives who have committed bad deeds during their lifetime. Such persons get seriously sick and, when they are about to die, Pāyāsi comes and speaks to them, saying: “If you go to a state of woe, to hell, you

²⁶⁷ DN.II. 322-352.

²⁶⁸ Sudharma Pandith, op.cit, p. 279.

²⁶⁹ *Iti pi n' atthi, n' atthi paraloko, n' atthi sattā opapātikā n' atthi sukaṭadukkaṭānaṃ kammānaṃ phalaṃ vipāko*, DN.II.315.

²⁷⁰ DN.II. 357.

should return and say to me: ‘There is other world, there are spontaneous born beings, there is fruit or as a result of good or evil deeds’ ”²⁷². Although they agree, after passing away, they neither return nor send a messenger to him. Because of this, Pāyāsi does not believe in life after death. To clear away Pāyāsi’s doubt, the Venerable Kumārakassapa utilises the simile of the condemned criminal (*coraṃ āgucāriṃ*). Suppose there were a criminal, who had been caught and was about to be executed. At the place of execution, the condemned criminal asks permission to visit his friends, companions and relatives in such and such places. Instead of granting him leave, the executioner would cut off the criminal’s head immediately. Just as the condemned criminal would not be allowed to visit his relatives, so were Pāyāsi’s friends not able to meet him again.

The remaining similes of this Sutta also perform their functions effectively. By means of those similes, the Venerable was able to correct Pāyāsi’s wrong view.

4.4. Similes used for the sake of poetic purpose.

Similes enhance the literary character and aesthetic value of the Pāli Nikāyas.²⁷³ Their features of spontaneity, simplicity and aptness have contributed to the beauty of the Pāli *gāthās*. The Buddha and his early disciples were great sages, poets and lovers of nature. These religious teachers composed various beautiful stanzas containing impressive similes. The Buddha at one place describes himself as a lotus unstained by water.²⁷⁴ The Venerable Godhika compares the falling rain to a sweet

²⁷¹ Maurice Walshe, op.cit, p. 351.

²⁷² Ibid, p.354.

²⁷³ Winternitz, op.cit, p.68.

²⁷⁴ AN.II.39.

melody.²⁷⁵ The elder Ekavihāriya likens his liberated mind to the moon on the fifteenth day.²⁷⁶ Thus, similes in the Pāli Nikāyas are really a language of imagery. It is interesting to view such figurative expressions from the poetic aspect.

Texts such as the Dhammapada, the Sutta Nipāta and the Thera gāthā and Therīgāthā are compiled almost entirely in verse. These texts are regarded by some as the only oases in the vast land of Pāli literature.²⁷⁷

The Dhammapada is a masterpiece of Pāli literature. A striking feature of the work is the wealth of similes from drawn everyday life.²⁷⁸ In these sayings, we come across several simple, but impressive, similes.²⁷⁹

The mind of the wise is likened to a clear and calm lake:

Even as a deep lake is clear and calm, so also wise men become tranquil after they have listened to the laws.²⁸⁰

Death is likened to a flood:

Death carries off a man who is gathering (life's) flowers, whose mind is distracted, even as a flood carries off a sleeping village"²⁸¹

²⁷⁵ Th. 51.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. 546.

²⁷⁷ Angraj Chaudhary, *The Nature in the Theragatha*, (Patna, Nava Nalanda Publication, 1960), p. 345.

²⁷⁸ Lakshmen R. Gunasekara, "Dhammapada", *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. IV., ed. W.G. Weeraratne, 1989.

²⁷⁹ Winternitz, op.cit, p.80.

²⁸⁰ S. Radhakrishnan, op.cit, p.85.

²⁸¹ Ibid, p. 75.

The simile of the swan beautifully portrays the attitude of non-attachment of the saint:

The thoughtful exert themselves; they do not delight in an abode; like swans who have left their lake, they leave their house and homes²⁸²

Keeping company with the wise is likened to the moon:

*Dhīrañ ca, paññañ ca, bahussutañ ca
dhorayhasīlaṃ, vatavantam, ariyaṃ
taṃ tādisaṃ, sappurisaṃ, sumedham
bhajetha nakkhattapatham va candimā*²⁸³

(Therefore, even as the moon follows the path of constellations one should follow the wise, the intelligent, the learned, the much enduring, the dutiful, the noble; such a good and wise man)²⁸⁴.

When craving is subdued, sorrow ceases:

*Yo cetam sahatī jammim
taṇham loke duraccayaṃ
sokā tamhā papatanti
udabindū va pokkharā*²⁸⁵

(He who overcomes in this world this fierce craving, difficult to subdue, sorrows fall off from him like water drops from a lotus leaf)²⁸⁶

²⁸² Ibid, p.89.

²⁸³ Dhp. 208.

²⁸⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, op. cit, p.127.

²⁸⁵ Dhp. 336.

And the feature of aptness on the part of similes is reflected by the following verse:

*Dīghā jāgarato rattī dīghaṃ santassa yojanaṃ
dīgho bālānaṃ saṃsāro saddhammaṃ avijānataṃ*²⁸⁷

(Long is the night to him who is awake, long is the yojana to him who is weary, long is the chain of existence to the foolish who do not know the true law)²⁸⁸

Like the Dhammapada, the Suttanipāta also abounds in striking similes. The monk who subdues his defilement is compared to a serpent:

*Yassa vitakkā vidhūpitā
Ajjhattaṃ suvikappitā asesā
So bhikkhu jahāti orapāraṃ
Urago jiṇṇaṃ iva tacamaṃ purāṇaṃ*²⁸⁹

(That bhikkhu whose (wrong) thoughts are burnt up, well cut-off internally, leaves this shore and the far shore as a snake leaves its old worn-out skin)²⁹⁰;

That bhikkhu who has cut off passion in its entirety,
Like one drying up a fast-flowing stream,
Leaves this shore and the far shore
As a snake leaves its old worn-skin²⁹¹.

²⁸⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, op. cit 164.

²⁸⁷ Dhp. 60.

²⁸⁸ S. Radhakrishnan, op.cit p.79.

²⁸⁹ Sn.7.

²⁹⁰ K.R. Norman, op.cit, p. 1.

The ideal sage is allegorically described as a lion:

Sīho va saddesu asantasanto
vāto va jālamhi asajjamāno
padumaṃ va toyena alippamāno
*eko care khaggavisāṇa kappo*²⁹²

(Not trembling, as a lion (does not tremble) at sounds, not caught up (with others), as the wind (is not caught up) in a net, not defiled (by passion), as a lotus (is not defiled) by water, one should wander solitary as rhinoceros horn)²⁹³

Reading the following poetical text, one cannot escape the beauty of the dialogue between the Buddha and Dhaniya Gopāla, the herdsman:

Herdsman:

“Boiled is my rice, milked are my cows,
 Along the bank of the river Grand
 I dwell with equals;
 Covered my hut, kindle my fire,
 So if thou wilt, rain, O god”.

The Buddha:

“Free from anger, free from stubbornness am I,
 Along the bank of the river Grand

²⁹¹ Ibid. p. 1.

²⁹² Sn.71.

²⁹³ K.R. Norman, op.cit, p. 7.

I dwell for a single night;
Uncovered my hut, extinguished my fire,
So if thou wilt, rain, O god”.

Herdsman:

“My wife is obedient, not wanton,
Long has she lived with me,
She is dear to my heart,
I hear no evil at all of her,
So if thou wilt, rain, O god”.

The Buddha:

“My thoughts are obedient, completely delivered,
In the course of a long period of time,
Developed to perfection, well tamed,
Moreover evil is not in me,
So if thou wilt, rain O god”²⁹⁴

The Theragāthā and Therīgāthā are the inspired verses of the Theras and Therīs of the early disciples of the Buddha who were arahants.²⁹⁵ These verses reflect their religious emotions and aspirations.²⁹⁶ These two collections of spiritual poems are filled with similes comparing the saints’ struggles, their spiritual achievement and realization. The elder Mahākotthita describes his practice as follows:

²⁹⁴ Burlingame, op.cit, p.197.

²⁹⁵ V.F.Gunaratne, *The Message of the Saints*, (Kandy, BPS, 1969), p.1.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, P.25.

*Upasanto uparato
mantabbhāni anuddhato
dhunāti pāpake dhamme
dumapattaṃ va māluto*²⁹⁷

(Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation, not conceited, he shakes off evil characteristics as the wind shakes off the leaves of a tree)²⁹⁸.

The Venerable Aññakoṇḍañña states:

*Rajaṃ upātaṃ vātena - yathā meghe pasāmaye
evaṃ sammanti saṅkappā - yadā paññāya passati*²⁹⁹

(Just as a rain-cloud would settle dust raised by the wind, so imagination comes to rest when one sees with wisdom)³⁰⁰.

Yet another Elder talks of his emancipation:

He whose *āsavas* are completely annihilated, and who is not interested in food, whose field of action is empty and singleness release his track is hard to find, like that of birds in the air³⁰¹.

Using many similes, the Therī Subhā warns of the danger of sensual pleasures, saying:

²⁹⁷ Th. 2.

²⁹⁸ K.R.Norman, op.cit, p.1.

²⁹⁹ Th. 675.

³⁰⁰ K.R.Norman, op.cit, p. 67.

³⁰¹ Ibid.p. 92.

“Sensual pleasures are enemies, murders, like a mass of fire, painful;”³⁰²

and

“Sensual pleasure is like a frightful attack, like a snake’s head, which fools delight in, blinds ordinary individuals”³⁰³.

We find in the Theragāthā abundant verses that record the Theras’ vivid appreciation of nature, albeit an appreciation that lacks any sense of attachment. They really were immune to any desire for the world, such being only thought.³⁰⁴ They expressed their liberation through the use of similes dealing with nature. Living in solitude, the theras uttered many *gāthās* employing similes that express the beauty of nature. For instance, the Venerable Kāludāyi portrays the spring season with the most lyric of verses:

The trees are now crimson, lord, having shed their (old) foliage, about to fruit. They illuminate as though aflame. Time partakes of flavour, great hero.³⁰⁵

The elder Tālaputta compares his liberated life to a deer:

³⁰² Thi.351.

³⁰³ Thi. 353.

³⁰⁴ *Na te kāmā yāni citrāni loke,
saṅkapparāgo purisassa kāmo;
tiṭṭhanti citrāni tath’ eva loke,
ath’ ettha dhīrā vinayanti chandaṃ* (SN. I. 22).

³⁰⁵ K.R.Norman, op.cit, p.54.

*Migo yathā seri sucittakānane
 ramam girim pāvisi abhamālinam
 anākule tattha nage ramissasi
 asaṃsayam citta parābhavissasi*³⁰⁶

(Like the deer roaming at will in the variegated grove, having entered the delightful mountain, wreathed in clouds, I shall rejoice there on the uncrowded mountain; you, mind, will certainly perish)³⁰⁷

and:

When the sky has rained, when the grass is four-fingers high, when the grove is in full flower, like clouds, I shall lie among the mountains like a tree. It will be soft for me, like cotton.³⁰⁸

4.5. Conclusion

Thus the use of similes in the Pāli Nikāyas is manifold and very appealing. Similes are especially used for the specific purposes, in which they perform their function effectively, either as a form of skilful means, as a figurative expression, or as an apt illustration. Many suttas contain the term “simile” in their titles, some examples being the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, the *Vatthūpama Sutta*, and the suttas that are to be found in the *Opammavagga*.

³⁰⁶ Th. 1144.

³⁰⁷ K.R. Norman, op.cit., p.104.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, p.104.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusion

The simile is an excellent figure of speech, and provides one of the most useful means for helping others understand things. The simile usually makes a comparison between two objects that are dissimilar from one another in all other respects in order to illustrate some point. It will be apparent from the above discussion that the simile represents an integral element within the whole of the Pāli Nikāyas. The Buddha and his disciples were eager to deliver the teaching of liberation in an effective way, so that each audience could easily understand and comprehend it. The similes they employed were used skillfully and effectively.

Similes play a very important role in the Buddha's teaching. Acting as a metaphorical expression, the simile possesses great efficacy. Similes create a fresh association for the listener, a clear picture that leaves a great impression in the mind. Due to an effective simile, whatever had been obscure, abstract or complicated becomes simple, attractive and convincing.

The Buddha's teachings have, over time, become highly appreciated, partly as a result of the similes they contain. Like the wanderer Vacchagotta³⁰⁹ and the householder Upāli³¹⁰, we joyfully make the same exclamation:

³⁰⁹ MN II.489.

³¹⁰ MN II.383,384.

*Abhikantaṃ bho Gotama, abhikkantaṃ bho Gotama. Seyyathāpi bho Gotama nikkujjitaṃ vā ukkujjeyya, paṭicchaṇṇaṃ vā vivareyya, mūlhassa vā maggaṃ ācikkheyya, andhakāre vā telapajjotaṃ dhāreyya cakkhumanto rūpaṃ dakkhintī ti, evaṃ evaṃ Bhagavā anekapariyāyena Dhammo pakāsito*³¹¹.

(Magnificent Master Gotama, magnificent, Master Gotama, Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been over thrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms)³¹².

5.2 Suggestions

I have examined some important similes in the five Nikāyas. I have discussed only selected similes that were used to explain main doctrinal issues. But there is still a large number of similes available in the Nikāyas. Those similes can also be studied. They are also rich with literary and historical importance. Further studies should be carried out on those similes.

My research is confined to the Suttapiṭaka. The other Piṭakas, namely the Vinaya and the Abhidhamma, are also rich with similes. The post-canonical commentaries are also full of similes. Those similes can be very useful for an understanding of the literary aspects and the historical background of the earlier texts. Further research on the similes found in the other Piṭakas and in the Commentaries would be of great value.

³¹¹ MN II. 384.

As we have seen, the Buddha used similes as a way to communicate the Dhamma to the masses easily and successfully. The Buddha's example is still valid today for those speaking and writing about the Dhamma. The Buddha's use of simple language and interesting similes was very helpful for common people trying to understand the Dhamma. Today still requires that we use simple language and contemporary similes when speaking and writing about the Dhamma. In that way, we will be able to attract many people to the Dhamma and make them understand the Dhamma very easily.

³¹² Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *op cit.*, p. 594.

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Biography

I, Ven.W.Piyarathana, was born in Mathale, Sri Lanka. He was ordained as a novice in 1987 and received upasampadā in 1996. He earned the Degree of Rajakeeya Pandita (Certificate of Oriental Studies) from the Oriental Studies Society of Sri Lanka. He received a Bachelor's Degree from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, and an MA Degree from the Buddhist and Pali University. He served as a teacher in a monks' educational center for six years and served as a Temporary Lecturer in the Department of Pali & Buddhist Studies, University of Peradeniya, for 13 months. He entered the Graduate School of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in 2003.