ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF ANIMALS IN INDIAN BUDDHISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE JĀTAKAS

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Buddhism perceives animals as if they were young children who do not have the intellectual capacity to understand the world as intelligently as humans and just like children need to be protected by humans. As humans are the most intelligent beings on planet earth and control almost everything, they have a responsibility toward rest of the flora and fauna. Moreover, while protecting the flora and fauna, humans in a way shall be protecting themselves. It is in this sense that this thesis proposes to examine the Buddhist attitude toward animals in the light of the facts mentioned in the Jātakas.

This Thesis consists of six chapters including introduction and conclusion.

Chapter I: “Introduction”. In this chapter, we have discussed the justification for the choice of this topic. This chapter also includes our analysis of the source material to be used and the research methodology to be employed.

Chapter II: “Animals versus Humans: Buddhist Perspective”. This chapter, relates largely to the ethical and moral aspects of issues concerning human use of animals for the purposes of food, labour, and various other needs. The major portion of this chapter is devoted to the tricky issue of meat-eating. We have discussed in detail the Theravādin principle of Tikōtiparisuddha, and the Mahāyāna regulations regarding vegetarian food.

Chapter III: “Animal Characters in the Jātakas”. Many a time, the teachings of the Buddha are conveyed through stories in which animal characters play a central role. This is done in a variety of ways. And the great
influence of the teaching of *kamma* in Buddhism. This is the teaching of *samsāra* (the cycle of births and deaths) where individual beings are born again and again in different forms according to their *kamma*. These themes are widely available in the *Jātaka* literature.

Chapter IV: “Animal, Buddha-nature and *Jātakas*”. As the expression ‘sentient beings’ means living beings which have feelings, animals would naturally fall within this group. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to show as to how the early Buddhist argument, which has been profoundly explained through the *Jātakas*, that all beings are sentient, lies at the very basis of the concept of Buddha- nature.

Chapter V: “*The Spirit of Kindness to Animals*”. The teachings of the Buddha are full of many tales of love towards animals. The precepts that the Buddhists follow are actually restrains on their actions and one of these rules is that one must not take the life of man or beast. In this chapter, the question of animal rights forms the central part.

Chapter VI: ‘Conclusion’. The *Jātaka* stories teach valuable lessons to correct our current life style. A disciple of the Buddha must maintain a mind of kindness and cultivate the practice of liberating beings. Buddhist environmentalists extend loving kindness and compassion beyond people and animals to include plants and the earth itself.