

Perceptions of Sri Lankan Buddhists about Karma with Special Reference to the Short Story 'Golden Oriel' Written by *Bhikkhuni* Suvimalee Karunaratna

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Introduction

There have been various questions, interpretations and believes about nature of human births, course of life, death and afterlife phenomenon in the world. Karma, a Sanskrit origin, has been one of such concepts commonly accepted by eastern religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism and Taoism with varying explanations, believes and arguments. Though the ideology Karma or Law of Karma refers to actions and results and cause and effect associated with rebirth of humans in this world, over the time, it has gained various meanings and connotations by people following those religions as luck, destiny and fate.

Research Question

This research aims to evaluate the perceptions of Sri Lankan Buddhists on Karma with special reference to the short story 'Golden Oriel' written by Bikkuni Suvimalee Karunaratna.

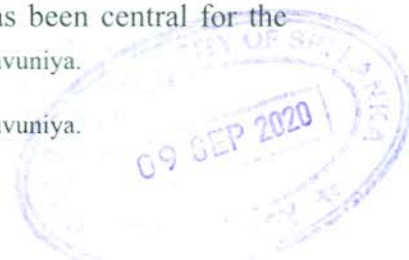
Literature Review

According to Cindel White, Adam Baimel and Ara Norenzayan (2017), people's believe about Karma contributes in shaping their psychological and behavioral patterns in life; moral judgements, moral emotions like guilt, shame and empathy, cooperation, social inequality and self-regulations.

Cindel J. M. White, Ara Norenzayan and Mark Schaller point out the relationship between actions and the consequences. According to them, good things happen in humans' lives due to their good acts and people encounter bad experiences in return to their bad conducts in their life.

Omid Akhavan says that the concept of Karma has been central for the

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ethical path in Buddhism. According to the theory, good and bad actions decide the life consequences individuals undergo in their lives.

Theravāda Buddhism, one of the oldest surviving branch of Buddhism found in Sri Lanka teaches that an individual can enjoy his/ her positive rebirths through his/her good actions and through merits in that a person can offset his/her negative Karma say Laurens de Rooij and Zsoka Koczan in an article on Buddhism.

Methodology

Selected lines from the short story 'Golden Oriel' written by Bikkhuni Suvimalee Karunaratna and secondary materials such as research articles, books and essays written by eminent scholars on the subject were taken for subject analysis. The findings have been reached by using descriptive and argumentative research methods over the contents.

Data Analysis

“There is no point in pursuing things that are not destined to take place”

“One should accept one’s karma- fate- as it comes” (Golden Oriel)

These lines are uttered by the mother character in the short story where she discusses about her daughter’s (Miss. Vithrme) wedding with her other members in the family. When the mother character expresses her unwillingness to give her daughter to a widower in marriage, through these lines, she predicts her daughter’s future with her own believe of karma. The lines show the association of fate with the concept karma in the speaker’s mind. According to the lines, people experience positive and negative karma due to their fate in their life. Here, karma stands as a negative force in humans’ lives. Further, the writer emphasizes its importance of acceptance without giving any other optional paths in individuals’ course of life when it occurs.

“See how one’s karma works....”

“just think how long you had to wait to meet the correct man” (Golden Oriel)

The above lines are spoken by the mother of the female character Miss. Vithrme in the short story when she finally finds a man to marry her daughter after a long period of time. This family has been portrayed as a typical Buddhist Sri Lankan social unit where the members are engaged in Buddhist religious Poojas and rituals in a routine basis. Through the above line, the writer expresses the believe of positive karma associated with encouragement and blessings in Sri Lankan Buddhists’ philosophy. The lines show the ideology of luck which has been linked with a theory karma in the thoughts of the people. Further, it has been

understood that man has no control of this life phenomenon and the same decides all the life encounters and possible times to happen in everyone's life.

“...one cannot force karma to make things happen that are not determined to happen....”(Golden Oriel)

These lines are spoken by the aunt Beatrice in the short story who has been portrayed as a match maker for the female character Miss. Vitrhne and others. This line is uttered to Miss. Vitrhne when the aunt informs her about the unexpected breakdown caused at Miss. Vitrhne's proposed marriage. Here, the aunt uses the concept karma to console the female teacher who has just become a victim for the marriage customs in the short story. According to the speaker, the life has been pre-determined by karma upon one's birth. And humans are powerless in redirecting its results in the life.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the writer through the characters in the short story portray the perceptions of Sri Lankan Buddhists about karma which they perceive as both positive and negative forces in life, pre-determined for individuals with luck and fate upon their births and thought by matured individuals at joyful as well as miserable life circumstances.

keywords: Karma, Golden, Oriel, Buddhism

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