

INDUCED ABORTION AS *PĀṆĀTIPĀTA* Revisiting Buddhist Position on the Right to Life of an Unborn

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Abstract: In this paper, investigating the issue whether Buddhism proposes (a) pro-life, (b) pro-choice, (c) middle way, or (d) ambiguous position on the issues of abortion, three questions are examined: (i) when does an individual life begin according to the early Buddhist texts? (ii) what are the cases of abortion recorded in the Pāli texts? (iii) how and why the Buddhist metaphysical and ethical principles prohibits killing? Analysing selected passages of Pāli texts such as *Majjhima*, *Saṃyutta* and *Aṅguttara Nikāya-s*, *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Milindapañha*, *Dhammapada* and *Jātaka*, and their metaphysical and ethical ideas the author argues that abortion is an act of *pāṇātipāta* (killing) a moral being and is prohibited.

Keywords: *Avihimsā*, *Gabbhapātana*, *Gandhabba*, *Jalābujāyoni*, *Pāṇātipāta*, *Pārājika*, *Thullaccaya*, *Utunī*.

1. Introduction

Induced abortion is an act of intentionally terminating a developing foetus, which has been often discussed on the basis of a dichotomy between the conservative 'pro-life' – right to life of an unborn – and the liberal 'pro-choice' – women's right to make a choice on the life of an unborn. According to pro-life proponents, depriving the life of an unborn is killing; because, the unborn baby is a morally significant person from the moment of conception and a member of the moral community with equal moral status like others. At the other end, pro-choice viewers argue that a woman should have the right to choose whether to carry a foetus or abort, as the foetus is part of her body.

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For the last five decades, several scholars have examined both for and against abortion issues from Buddhist perspectives. For instance, Phillip Lecso affirms Buddhism is against abortion; however, the decision should be left to the pregnant women in a situation where a mother's life is threatened (214-18). Similarly, Bhikkhu Nyanasobhano states "we should choose with open eyes, and choose rightly" (25). Peter Harvey, however, argues that abortion may be permissible within Buddhism, not on the ground of Buddhist virtue of compassion, but as a 'lesser evil' in the cases of (i) real or possible threat to the life of the mother, (ii) pregnancy as a result of rape causing great trauma, and (iii) the alternative being a mentally ill woman further traumatized by having to give up her child for adoption. In the case of second and fourth careful medical and psychological assessments are essential. He further argues that women would have the right to choose against medical advice not to have an abortion, but not to choose to have an abortion where the medical grounds were inadequate (311-52). Constantin-Iulian Damian also holds the position that "in some cases, Buddhism allows abortion" (126). In his view, since the early Buddhist Pāli texts do not mention anything about therapeutic abortion, it could be interpreted as an implicit acceptance of induced abortion (134).

William LaFleur (67-92) and Pinit Ratanakul (53-66) while referring to Japanese and Thai cultures respectively argue that Buddhism holds a middle way on abortion issue. Similarly, Perrett Roy analysing both the positions and the ritual *mizukokuyōā* (Buddhist memorial service for aborted children) holds that such a ritual "represents a morally appropriate Buddhist response" or a middle way on the abortion issue (112).

Damien Keown, however, holds that Buddhism cannot proffer a middle way on the abortion issue, because it is already committed to the 'pro-life' by the principle of *avihimsā* (non-violence) (199-17). Frank Tedesco examining both the *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* traditions argues that abortion is next to killing (91-106). Highlighting early Buddhist texts and their narratives James McDermott holds that Buddhism holds a pro-life position (157-82). On the other hand, according to Helen Tworikov, Buddhism involves taking both the sides on abortion issue (60-69). Jean Brown observes that "Buddhist views of abortion are purposefully noncommittal" (488), and Robert Florida holds that Buddhist position on abortion is ambiguous (Florida 133-60).

In short, although it seems Buddhism holds an ambiguous position on the issue of abortion, it represents a unique perspective that may help in solving emerging moral dilemma on the issue of abortion. With this objective, this paper investigates three questions, using early Pali texts: (i) When does an individual human life begin? (ii) What are the cases of abortion recorded in the Pāli texts? and (iii) Why do the early Buddhist ethical precepts prohibit killing in general and abortion in particular.

2. Origin of the Individual Human Life

According to the *Saṅgīti* and *Mahāsīhanāda Sutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya* (III. 230) and *Majjhima Nikāya* (I.73) a life can begin from four kinds of generation (*yoniyō*): egg-born generation (*aṇḍajāyoni*), womb-born generation (*jalābujāyoni*), moisture-born generation (*saṃsedajāyoni*), and spontaneous generation (*opapātikāyoni*). Human life begins at the moment of conception that occurs, first of all, when a set of conditions — (i) sexual intercourse of couple, (ii) the woman is in her fertile period, and (iii) a *gandhabba* is present — are fulfilled (*Majjhima Nikāya* I.265-266 and II.157). Secondly, these three conditions are given in the order: (i) coitus, (ii) the woman in her season, and (iii) presence of *gandhabba*. Thirdly, all the three elements must be present at the same time, if one of them is absent, the conception cannot occur; neither of them alone nor any two of them are sufficient.

Although, the text *Majjhima Nikāya* endorses significance of a sexual intercourse between the mother and father for pregnancy, there are other Pāli texts that speak of conception without coitus. For instance, according to the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (III 204-5) pregnancy is recorded without physical contact between the *bhikkhu* Udāyin and *bhikkhuni*, and in the *Mātaṅga Jātaka* Mātaṅga's right-hand-thumb touch on the navel of his wife Diṭṭha-Maṅgalika caused her to conceive and she brought forth a son ^{Maṇḍavya}-Kumāra (497). Similarly, according to the story of *Sāma Jātaka*, Pārikā becomes pregnant when Dukūlaka (her husband) touched her navel (540). Milindapaṇha also records regarding the relation between Sakka, *Devaraj* acquainted to the ascetic Dukūla "... when the women ascetic [Pārikā] has her season and it is her proper time, touch her navel with the thumb of your right hand. This itself is a conjunction for a descent into a womb" (126).

Similarly references about pregnancy in the absence of a coitus (but with semen exchange) are in the *Milindapañha* and *Jātaka*. For instance, once two women, during their fertile period, visited at the urinal of two ascetics and drank ascetics' urine mixed with their semen; they conceived and brought forth the boy Sankicca and the ascetic Isisinga (*Milindapañha* 124). Similar narratives are recorded in the *Alambusā* (523) and *Naḷinikā Jātaka* (526), according to which women conceived due to drinking water, which was mingled with Brahmin's semen. These references show that there is a possibility of pregnancy without any direct sexual intercourse, and therefore coitus is not an essential condition for the pregnancy; women having her season is the first and essential condition, rather than coitus.

Second condition states "*mātācautunīhoti.*" The term *utunī* in *Milindapañha* (125, 127), *Vinaya Piṭaka* (III 18), *Samyutta Nikāya* (IV.239), *Majjhima Nikāya* (I.265-266; II.157), *Jātaka* (497, 523, 540) and *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (III.221) refers to a woman in her menstruating season. In *Papancasūdanī* the term *utunī* refers to the women who have completed her menstrual periods (II 310). Moreover, "when that nun was in [her] season, when her *kalalam* was established when the motion of her blood was cut, i.e., her periods terminated, when her condition was laid down, ... she became pregnant" (*Milindapañha* 125). A pregnancy is possible soon after the menstruation, not during the period.¹ Hence the term *utunī* refers not to menstruation, but to the "fertile period following it as well" (Boisvert 303; Jha 3, 45).

Third condition specifies the presence of a *gandhabba* (*gandhabbocapaccupaṭṭhitohoti*). In the Pāli texts the term, *gandhabba*, has been denoted at least in three senses: (i) music/song (*Milindapañha* 3), (ii) deities (*gandhabbakāyikādevā*) dwelling in fragrant roots, heartwood, softwood, bark, shoots, leaves, flowers, fruits, sap and scents (*Samyutta Nikāya* III.250), and (iii) a *samsāric* being ready to be reborn. According to Ralph Lilley Turner, in all the four indo-aryan languages, i.e., Sanskrit, Pāli, Prakrit, and Sinhalese the term is related to music, musician, singer, etc. (221). Bhikkhu Analayo states that "the

¹According to *Carakasamhītā*, "(Now) the order in which the embryo is formed is explained. After the accumulated menstrual blood is discharged and the new one is situated, the women having cleanly bathed and which undamaged genital passage, ovum and uterus is called as having opportune period" (IV 7).

Buddhist conception of a *gandhabba* appears to have its roots in the Vedic *gandharva* (91-105). Giuseppe Baroetto affirms that "the consciousness which has abandoned the physical body and finds itself in the intermediate state (*antarā-bhava*) is called *gandhabba* (in Sanskrit *gandharva*), namely a 'spirit'" (265-272). Peter Harvey explains the *gandhabba* as genuine empirical self, found between-lives (107). It is in this third sense the term is used here to refer to that which exists between death and birth.

3. Recorded Cases of Abortion in the Pāli Texts

The Pāli texts use *gabbhā-apagata* for natural abortion² *gabbhā-pātana*³ and *gabbhā-pātetī*⁴ for induced abortion. In the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Suttavibhanga*, Third *Pārājika*, seven cases of abortion are recorded. In the first case, a woman whose husband was living away from home became pregnant by a lover. She appealed to a monk, who was dependent on her family, to provide her with an abortive preparation. The monk gave her an abortifacient and the child died within the mother's womb. The second case speaks of a man who had two wives, one barren and the other fertile. When the fertile wife became pregnant, the barren wife became intensely jealous and she asked a monk find an abortive preparation for her. The monk gave her a potion and the child died within mother's womb and the mother survived. In the third instance a monk gave an abortifacient to a woman and as a result the mother died, but the child survived; the potion killed both the mother and child, in the fourth case. In the fifth case, though the monk gave the potion, neither mother and nor the child died. Upon the request for abortifacient, in the sixth and seventh cases the monks suggested the pregnant women to "scorch yourself, sister" (*Vinaya Piṭaka* III. 82-3) to terminate the pregnancy.

In these seven cases, there were two prominent reasons for women to seek abortion, i.e., extramarital affairs while her husband was away and domestic rivalry between co-wives. Besides, there are other narratives, in which abortion occurred in the process of

²*Gabbhā* stands for foetus and *apagata* refers to gone; indeed, *gabbhā-apagata* implies the lost foetus, a miscarriage.

³Here *gabbhā* means pregnancy and *pātana* refers falling/bringing to fall/destroying/killing and so forth.

⁴Here *gabbhā* is foetus and *pātetī* refers to remove.

preserving the pregnancy. For instance, we are told in one of the *Jātaka* (121-2) stories that the Queen of King Bimbisara lost her child, while resorting to have her womb massaged and steamed in order to preserve the foetus.

There are three methods of abortion, used in the texts: abortive preparation, pressing/crushing the womb, and scorching own body. In addition to these three methods, Buddhaghosa adds a fourth one that some women “wish that the embryo in the womb should not be delivered safely” and therefore, they with the help of a person who has achieved psychic control and mental mastery direct evil thoughts toward the embryo in the womb (*Samantapāsādikā* 11, 441). Similarly, Carakasamhita advised that pregnant women not to wear red clothes, to avoid attacks from demons on the unborn child. Evil attacks on the unborn baby were a common acceptance within the broader Pan-Indian folklores and narratives.

4. Ethical Precepts against Destroying Human Life

Pāli texts forbid the practice of abortion, and involvements in abortion would cause expulsion from the *Saṅgha*. Those monks, who have given advice for abortion or abortive preparation to the women in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* face punishment: *pārājika* (an offence that results in a permanent expulsion from the *saṅgha*) or *thullaccaya* (a grave offence resulting in temporary suspension), depending on the gravity of the offence.

In the seven cases narrated in the previous section, in the first (child died), second (child died), fourth (both the mother and infant died), sixth (child died), and seventh (child died) the expulsion of the monks from the order was inescapable and absolute. They committed the gravest transgression of the rules. Whereas, in the third (child survived and mother died) and fifth (both the mother and infant survived) cases there was no offence involving expulsion, as they were identified *thullaccaya*. Moreover, in the first, second, fourth, sixth, and seventh cases, the monks' intention was to deprive a life of an unborn, and their abortive preparations and advises to the women caused death of the unborn along with the mother (in some cases); thus, there was the penalty of permanent expulsion from the *saṅgha*. Whereas, in the case of third and fifth, the monks' intention was to kill the infant, but the foetus survived, and mother died in the third and both survived in the fifth. As there was no intention to kill the mothers

the penalty was limited to temporary suspension from the *saṅgha*. In short, in the case where 'child dies and mother survives' the monk faces *pārājika*; whereas, in the case of 'child lives, and the mother dies' the monk faces *thullaccaya*. In the case of both (child and mother die) monk faces *pārājika*; whereas, in the case of neither die the monk faces *thullaccaya* for their unwholesome actions.

Theoretically, *Pārājika* Three of *Vinaya*'s narratives are affirming the moral consequences of an act, which are determined by the volition or intention of monks. The notion of *cetanā* (intention/volition) declared to be *kamma* by the Buddha "[i]t is volition, *bhikkhus*, that I call *kamma*" (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* III 415); the *kamma* of body, speech, and mind that carries moral values and resultant consequences that one has to be experienced in this very life, or in the next rebirths, or in some subsequent occasion. In other words, there is causal connection between what a living being does and what she/he is in this life or becomes in the next. Acts in the past lives establish the *kammic* foundations or pre-conditions that give rise to the rebirth. In short, the *Sutta* comprehensively states that there would be retribution for human deeds.

There is *kamma* to be experienced in hell; there is *kamma* to be experienced in the animal realm; there is *kamma* to be experienced in the realm of afflicted spirits; there is *kamma* to be experienced in the human world; and there is *kamma* to be experienced in the *deva* world (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* III.415).

Buddhism perceives life as a series of many lives connected with each other by *kammic* forces; consequences decide future rebirths in accordance with their deeds in different realms. Good and bad rebirths are the natural result of certain kinds of actions. When the Subha once asked the Buddha,

... what is the cause and condition why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior? For people are seen to be short-lived (*appāyuka*) and long-lived (*dīghāyuka*), sickly (*bahvābādā*) and healthy (*appābādā*), ugly (*dubbāṇṇā*) and beautiful (*vaṇṇavanto*), uninfluential (*appesakkhā*) and influential (*mahesakkhā*), poor (*appabhogā*) and wealthy (*mahābhogā*), low-born (*nīcakulīnā*) and high-born (*uccākulīnā*), stupid (*duppaññā*) and wise (*paññavanto*) (*Majjhima Nikāya* III.202-203).

The Buddha gave *Dhamma* to Subha with saying "... beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; they originate from their

actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior" (*Majjhima Nikāya* III. 203). The *Sutta* bestows some specific examples of the fruits of *kamma*, based on the simple notion of good begets good, and evil begets evil.

In the *Sallekha Sutta* actions are distinguished as wholesome (*kusala*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) based on their underlying motives, roots (*mūla-s*):

And what is the root of the unwholesome (*akusalamūla*)? Greed (*lobho*) is a root of the unwholesome; hatred (*doso*) is a root of the unwholesome; delusion (*moho*) is a root of the unwholesome ... And what is the root of the wholesome (*kusalamūla*)? Non-greed (*alobho*) is a root of the wholesome; non-hate (*adoso*) is a root of the wholesome; non-delusion (*amoho*) is a root of the wholesome. This is called the root of the wholesome (*Majjhima Nikāya* I.47).

Behaviour rooted in *akusala-mūla-s*, i.e., *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha* generates violence; incline one's mind towards destructive attitude and that also leads one to act harmfully towards oneself, others, and yields nothing but anguish (*Majjhima Nikāya* I. 415-416). Moreover, *akusala-mūla-s* lead one's mind to act in such a way that they become vulnerable not only for themselves, but for others as well. Ultimately, their actions spread anguish all around.

Moreover, out of *akusala-mūla-s* one considers wrongly that 'this is my body' and 'this wealth belongs to me'. *Dhammapada* teaches that "[t]he fool is tormented thinking 'these sons belong to me', 'this wealth belongs to me'. He himself does not belong to himself. How then can sons be his? How can wealth be his?" (V 3). Claiming this is my body and that foetus is only a part of my body are false views of self and body. Moreover, the sense of 'I', 'mine' and 'me' leads one towards self-interest, which causes individual demands such as right to abort of a developing baby in the womb. For instance, *Vinaya Pitaka* Third *Pārājika* affirms women seek abortifacient without considering the unborn life and the harmonious and peaceful co-existence between the mother and child in her womb. Due to greed, saving self-image, and hatred they asked for abortifacient. In this sense, these three positions lead one to a misguided sense of 'I', 'other' and foetus, and abortion. According to Robert E. Florida, these three are directly linked with the practice of abortion,

Greed, that is passionate attachment, would lie behind a persons' considering only their own interests or pleasures in the situation. It would also solidify the notion that an 'I' owned the foetus and could do with it what 'I' would. Hatred would motivate one to strike out to eliminate the perceived cause of discomfort, the foetus. Delusion might cloud one's understanding and lead to denial that the foetus is a living being" ("Buddhist Approach to Abortion," 44).

According to the principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, nothing has independent self-being; all beings are interdependent on each other and on certain causal conditions. Since all beings are interdependent, we should protect and take care of one another like ourselves. Therefore, it is not just the responsibility of the mother to protect the baby as the baby totally depends on her; all others involved also have the moral responsibility to protect the baby in the womb. All should be sympathetic and help others in completing the journey toward the ultimate goal of *nibbāna*.

4.1 Unity of Baby in the Womb, Infant, and Adult

In the Pāli texts all sentient beings are analysed into the five impersonal aggregates (*khandha*-s): *vedanā* (feeling), *saññā* (perception), *sankhārā* (disposition), *viññāṇa* (consciousness) and *rūpa* (body) (*Majjhima Nikāya* 1.38-9). There is nothing outside of *pañca-khandha*-s; and all phenomena are simply complex bundles of five aggregates. Moreover, all beings are impermanent (*aniccā*), in the state of suffering (*dukkhā*), and without essence or self (*anattā*) (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* 1.286; *Dhammapada* XX.5,6,7). Impermanence, suffering, and no-self, known as *tilakkhaṇa*, are the three universal characteristics of all existing things of the phenomenal world. There is nothing divine, permanent, and unchanging; everything is in a state of suffering. There are no differences between two distinct phenomena in the light of their characteristics; more specifically, there is no necessary ontological difference among a baby in the womb, infant, and adult human being. The taking of a life within or outside the womb is killing.

There are five necessary conditions for materialization of the act of killing; (i) *pāṇa* (the fact and presence of a living human or animal), (ii) *pāṇasaññita* (the knowledge that the being is a living being), (iii) *badhaka-citta* (the intention or resolution to kill), (iv) *upakkama* (the act of killing by appropriate means), and (v) *maraṇa* (the resulting death)

(*Atthasālinī* 97). In the absence of these conditions the act would not constitute killing even though there is death. The event would be considered an accident and would not entail any evil effect for the performer or people involved. Having or performing abortion directly refers to these conditions: (i) the foetus is an individual living being, (ii) both the mother and doctor know about the living status of the foetus, (iii) there is an intention to kill/deprive life, (iv) abortionist makes effort for it, and (v) abortion brings death as a consequence. Therefore, abortion is a *pāṇātipātā*, strongly prohibited by Buddhist precepts. A mother does not have the right to kill/deprive life of the foetus in her womb because foetus is an individual human being right from the moment of conception, and as a living being there is no necessary difference among a baby in the womb, infant, and adult.

4.2. *Pāṇātipātāveramaṇī*: Injunction against Intentional Killing

The first precept, *pāṇātipātāveramaṇīsikkhāpadaṃsamādiyāmi* (I undertake the precept to abstain from taking life), restrains one from intentional destroying, causing to be destroyed, or sanctioning the destruction of a life. The term used for killing life, *pāṇātipātā*, consists of three parts, i.e., *pāṇa*, *ati*, and *pātā*. *Pāṇa* stands for sentient being, *ati* is a prefix which means quickly or rapidly, and *pātā* refers to fall. In this sense, the term *pāṇātipātā* refers the act of intentionally and forcefully destroying the life of any living being.⁵ The term *veramaṇī* stands for the act of abstinence. The term *pāṇātipātāveramaṇī* jointly advocates abstaining from the violence towards any sentient being and practice of non-violence.

The practice of this ethical precept, which all Buddhists whether they are monks, nuns, or lay persons are obliged to follow, is injunction against intentional killing. Moreover, it affirms a determination not to kill, not to let others kill, not to support any act of killing in thought, word, or deed. Therefore, it is against the Buddhist ethical principle to have an abortion, perform one, or advise someone to have one. The *Vinaya* rules clearly prohibit the intentional violence against any sentient beings, irrespective of their size; it is an offense that may cause permanent or temporary expulsion from the *saṅgha*:

⁵In technical sense, it is *pāṇa-vadha* (striking, killing, slaughter, destruction, execution of living being) or *pāṇa-ghāta* (striking, killing of living beings).

When a monk is ordained he should not intentionally deprive a living thing of life, even if it is only an ant. Whatever monk deprives a human being of life even down to causing abortion, he becomes not a (true) recluse, not a son of the Sakyans. As a flat stone, broken in half, becomes (something) not to be put together again, even so a monk, having intentionally deprived a human being of life, becomes not a (true) recluse, not a son of the Sakyans. This is a thing not to be done by you as long as life lasts" (IV.124-125).

There are several narratives in the early Buddhist scriptures that prescribe punishment for intentional harming and forgiveness for unintentional harming. For instance, "at that time a certain monk who was preparing a seat in the refectory inside a house, took hold of a pestle, the pestles being high up, when a second pestle falling down, hit the head of a certain boy (hard); he died ... the Buddha said: there is no offence, monk, as it was not intentional" (*Vinaya Piṭaka* III.78). For several monastic rules, it is specified that there is no fault if the action is an unintentional (*asañcicca*), for one who lacks mindfulness (*asatiyā*), not knowing, i.e., being absentminded or perhaps careless. Whereas, when a monk, in fun, throws a stone down to the Vultures Peak, and it ends up killing a man, he is guilty of a wrongdoing (*dukkaṭa*) (*Vinaya Piṭaka* III.82), a level of offence less serious even than a *thullaccaya*. The Pali texts, however, is very clear that deliberately depriving life is highly punishable offence, and results in unfavourable consequences. And the practice of *pāṇātipātā-veramaṇī* contributes to the accumulation of merits that both support one in the present life and ensure happiness in the next rebirth.

4.3 The Principle of *Kamma*

Depriving the life of a human being is a bad *kamma* and it does bring demerit for doer. Intentionally destroying a developing foetus is a wicked deed, causing bad consequences and unfavourable rebirth. The *Petavatthu Sattaputtakhāda* narrates the story of a certain land-owner's wife who was barren; the man married again, and the new wife became pregnant. When the barren one knows that the new wife is with a child, she employs a certain forest wanderer to bring about an abortion. When she is confronted by their relatives and husband, the guilty wife protests her innocence and denies her involvement. To prove her innocence and good faith, the barren women is asked to take an oath, which she falsely swears. Not long afterwards she dies,

and reborn as a naked and ugly, ill-smelling, covered with flies ill-favoured ghost (I.6). In another narrative a barren woman devised evil against a young maiden and caused the fall of an unborn child. In consequence of this wicked deed she is reborn as a ghost (I.27). These two narratives of the *Petavatthu* shows that destroying any form of human life will yield bad and unfavourable consequences such as ill-health and reborn as ghosts/hell-beings. More specifically, according to the Buddhist vision, those who kill or harm beings accrue bad *kamma* and will likely be born in the realm of hell to be tortured until and unless their sin is expunged. Similarly, the anecdotes of *Samkicca-Jātaka* (530) state that murder is a grievous thing that leads to the road to hell (*niraya*). Those who are guilty of abortion are reborn in the great hell (*mahāniraya*), *Khuradhāra*, where a great caustic river known as *Vaitaraṇī*⁶ flows and the murderer cannot break away from its cutting water. The one who destroys life invites unfavourable consequences and digs up his/her-own roots even in this very life (*Dhammapada* XVIII. 12). For instance, in the *Kuruṅga Jātaka* (21), we are told that the *Bodhisatta* in his previous life told a hunter “[y]ou may have missed me, my good man, but ... you have not missed the reward of your conduct, namely, the eight large and sixteen lesser hells and all the five forms of bonds and torture.”

According to the principle of *kamma* our state of being in the present life is the result of our deeds in previous lives. Those who engage in unwholesome deeds are reborn into the lower states of existence and if consequences ripen in the human world, they bring them pain and misfortune. Nobody can escape from the fruits of their deeds (*Dhammapada* XII.9). It is said in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the fruits of *kamma* is to be experienced in hell, in the animal realm, in the realm of afflicted spirits, in the human world, or in the *deva* world (III.415). Being born in different realms in accordance with their deeds, they experience the good and bad results, and when the generative *kamma* spends its force, they pass away to take rebirth as determined by still another *kamma* that has found the opportunity to ripen.

The Buddhist theory of cosmos is divided into three broad realms namely, the sense-sphere realm, the fine-material realm, and the

⁶*Vaitaraṇī Nadī* waters are bitter and sharp as razors. It is also mentioned that those who enter in it are slashed up by sword and similar sharp weapons standing hidden along the riverbank.

immaterial realm. Each of these comprises a range of subsidiary planes, amounting to a total of thirty-one planes of existence. The world of sense-desire (*kāmaloka*) consists of the first eleven states: (i) the world of hell (*niraya*), (ii) the asura-s (*asurā*), (iii) hungry ghost (*petaloka*), (iv) animal world (*tiracchāna yonī*), (v) human world (*manussaloka*), (vi) deva-s of the four great kings (*catumahārājikādevā*), (vii) thirty-three gods (*tavatīmsadevā*), (viii) yama devas (*yāmadevā-s*) (ix) contented deva-s (*tusitādevā*), (x) deva-s delighting in creation (*nimmānaratīdevā*), (xi) deva-s wielding power over others' creations (*paranimmitāvāsavattīdevā*) (Walshe 38-39). In these, human realm has special privilege; only one who is born in the human realm can gain *nibbāna*; it is impossible to experience *nibbāna* being in any other spheres than human. In this sense, destroying foetus is not merely a killing human being it is interrupting the journey of *nibbāna*.

4.4. Abortion Interrupts the Journey toward *Nibbāna*

Getting rebirth in human realm is considered to be difficult and rare: "[h]ard to gain is birth as man; hard is the life of mortals; hard to get is the opportunity of hearing the teaching of the Buddhas; hard it is for a Buddha to appear" (*Dhammapada* XIV.4). In addition, a human rebirth is considered superlatively valuable because the human circle motivates one to look for approaches to be freed from all suffering. Each human birth is a great opportunity both for the expression of the effects of previous actions, and for the attainment of the *nibbāna*. Therefore, "[i]f a man does what is good, he should do it again and again; he should take delight in it; the accumulation of merit leads to happiness" (*Dhammapada* IX. 3). One can accumulate merits towards attainment of the *nibbāna* through the practice of *pañca-sīla* (five precepts): abstaining from killing, stealing, sensuous misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants. These five precepts are the psycho-ethical disciplines that highlight the *kusala-cetanā* (skilful-volition) of the disciples to refrain from performing certain actions.

The *pañca-sīla* are the most basic Buddhist precepts that are undertaken by all who enter the *saṅgha* for practicing *dhamma*. They are called the treasures of virtue (*sīladhana*) (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV.5), and the one who has a perfect observation of them gains perfection of virtue (*sīlasampadā*) (*Samyutta Nikāya* II.66). Those who observe these five ethical precepts will live the life of a householder with self-possession (*visārado*) (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* III.203); they are reborn in the

heavenly world, or can generate merit towards the attainment of spiritual perfection, *nibbāna*. Therefore, abortion or intentionally depriving of life of developing foetus thwarts the unfolding of *kamma* and consequently interrupts the journey toward the *nibbāna* for both the doer and the foetus.

5. Conclusion

Forcefully destroying the life of any living being or induced abortion is *pāṇātipātā*, which precisely suggests practice of *karuna* will not include abortion. *Karuna* and killing (destroying the life) are completely two different ways of life and cannot be mingled. Nevertheless, one cannot practice *karuna* by killing a baby; more specifically, induced abortion cannot be justified as “compassionate-killing.” In this sense, abortion may happen during the treatment of a woman, but there should be no intention of doing the same; even if we know that abortion is likely, the intention is to treat the woman. Although there are rituals such as *MizukoKuyo* and others for aborted children, which in fact show that what was done was wrong; it does not mean abortion is permitted; such rituals are part of the penance (*Prāyaścitta*). Therefore, any form of killing is wrong, and Buddhism precisely prohibits killing and promotes compassion.

We have seen that the very first Buddhist precept, *pāṇātipātā-veramaṇī*, advocates abstaining from the violence and practice of non-violence. It affirms a determination not to kill, not to let others kill, not to support any act of killing in thought, word, and deed. A woman claiming that it is her body and the foetus a body part are false views of self and body, rooted in the three poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion. These three poisons pave the way for vulnerability to self and others and spread anguish all around. They also falsely affirm ontological difference among a baby in the womb, infant, and adult human being and motivate one to pursue induced abortion.

The Buddhist texts affirm that pregnancy due to illegitimate coitus/extramarital affairs, and domestic rivalry between co-wives are two most prominent reasons for abortion, which shows abortion was for themselves and their reputation without taking into account the unborn. Buddhist way of life advocates complete abstinence from greed, hatred, and delusion for the wellbeing of all. Moreover, abortion interrupts the journey toward *Nibbāna* by the unborn and the people involved.

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